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OR,

Solving a Master-Rogue Mystery.

The Romance of the Kerton
Complication.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK,)

AUTHOR OF "HAWK HERON, THE FALCON DETECTIVE," "OLD GRIP," "DETECTIVE WALDEN'S WEB," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE BANKER'S GUEST.

MR. ISAAC GRANTBY was the president and chief stockholder of the Mount Kerton Bank, the place indicated being a thriving and rapidly growing Westchester county town within a dozen miles of New York.

Directly after business on a summer day of not many years ago, Mr. Grantby entered his residence, looking pale and disturbed, though resolved and stern.

"I am expecting a visitor, Norah, a strange gentleman," he said to the neat and comely housemaid who admitted him. "Show him into

THE NEXT INSTANT THE DETECTIVE HAD THE DEAD-ALIVE'S HEAD ON HIS ARM, AND WAS ADMINISTERING SMALL PORTIONS OF THE BRANDY.

the library at once, where I shall be awaiting him."

"What name, sir?" inquired the servant, with something more than a conventional courtesy, for Mr. Grantby was an indulgent employer.

"Mr. Magnus; but there will doubtless be no one else. Show him right in."

And as the girl disappeared, with a parting obeisance, he threw after her a glance of what seemed to be both doubt and commiseration.

Entering his library, however, the look of pre-occupied trouble reappeared in his face, as he seated himself in one of the cozy apartment's comfortable arm-chairs, and crossed his legs reflectively.

A widower with but one child, a beloved daughter, Mr. Grantby was an amiable and successful business man, of fifty, whose lines had until very recently lain in pleasant places.

Then had suddenly come the trouble that was now distressing him.

It was this: Early on the morning of that very day a trusted young man, Randall Maycourt by name, and the bookkeeper of his banking establishment, had been found lifeless on the floor before the open doors of the bank-safe, which he had evidently been in the act of robbing at the moment of being suddenly and mysteriously stricken down by the visitation of the destroyer. Was it by heart-disease, a sudden fear of detection, or by a fatal cataleptic or apoplectic stroke? However that might be determined, the saddest feature of the calamity was that he had betrayed himself as a thief before he died. There could be no doubt about it. A satchel, still clutched in the insensible hand, was stuffed with the freshly-purloined cash, to the amount of several thousand dollars, though there was still a much larger amount remaining in the safe, which time had doubtless not been given him to secure. On the young man's person were likewise found newly-secured railroad tickets for the Canadian border, together with a wig and false whiskers with which he had evidently intended to facilitate and secure his flight in disguise.

Life and reputation to be snatched at one fell stroke, and on the threshold of what had seemed to be a promising and honorable business career!

Nor was this all. The banker had known and loved the young man almost from his infancy. Moreover, his first, earliest love had been for the misguided youth's mother, whom he would gladly have made his wife had not fate and circumstances stepped in between. Yes, for that unhappy and widowed mother, still in her attractive middle-age, who, together with her only daughter, Ada Maycourt, was now distracted with grief and shame in her cottage home beside the lifeless remains of him who had been her joy and pride—so abruptly, so unaccountably, it would seem, lost not only to life, but also to honor and respectful remembrance!

Nay, more: Randall had even won, the banker feared, the heart of his child, his beloved Grace. And though this had not prevented him in his worldly wisdom to choose otherwise for her, and much less to her satisfaction, in the person of Mr. Catesby Bartlow, his brilliant and capable cashier, not the less did his heart go out now to the inconsolable widow and sister in their supreme distress, and to the unhappy youth thus undone.

Mr. Grantby heaved a sigh, and then his lips came together with a stern expression as he produced and re-perused a telegram received a few hours previously, which ran as follows:

"OFFICE BLINKERTON DETECTIVE BUREAU, {
"NEW YORK, August 1, 188-."}
ISAAC GRANTBY, ESQ.

"President Mt. Kerton Bank:-

"Description of case received and noted. Our Mr. Magnus will place himself at your service at 4 P. M. to-day. Trust him implicitly.

"R. BLINKERTON."

"Magnus!" repeated the banker to himself, and perhaps not for the first time. "The name seems not altogether unknown to me. Where, and in connection with what celebrated criminal case, have I seen it before? However, I trust that the bureau has sent me an expert."

Here there was a ring at the house-bell, and, as Mr. Grantby rose expectantly, a pale, gentlemanly-appearing young man was ushered in by the girl Norah, with the words, "Mr. Magnus, sir."

The banker was both surprised and puzzled, for on advancing with extended hand toward his visitor, the latter was observed to give a slight but significant start, suggestive of a species of unpleasant thrill, as the girl inadvertently brushed against him in taking her departure from the room.

Then, after the preliminary commonplaces, the detective composedly took the seat that was proffered him, and increased his host's surprise by saying, thoughtfully:

"Pray pardon me, sir, for a slight irrelevance before we proceed to the case in hand. But that young servant girl—has she always proved herself thoroughly honest and trustworthy?"

The banker looked at his strange questioner searchingly, and even with a somewhat mystified look.

The detective might be young a man of thirty,

or less. In addition to his natural pallor of complexion and gentlemanly, unobtrusive appearance, he was singularly, but somewhat effeminately handsome, with refined features, an especially sensitive mouth, shaded by a well-cared-for but not abundant mustache, wavy dark hair, and deep-set, dreamy eyes that were as black as sloes'. He might have been taken for a well-to-do poet, or student, but for a certain indefinable something in his face suggestive of an iron will and lynx-like observation as the characteristics of the inner man. And just in the same way, his slight-built but perfectly proportioned frame might be the abode of unexpected athletic vigor and activity.

"No, sir, she has not," replied Mr. Grantby. "As a matter of confidence between us, the girl has once been detected in a dishonest action. But she has been forgiven, and is now on trial again."

"Ah, thank you!" indifferently. "Now to business, Mr. Grantby. My chief has placed me in possession of such facts in connection with the tragic case in hand as he obtained from your messenger of this morning, and I am now at your service."

"Wait, if you please," said the banker. "I beg of you, Mr. Magnus, to first satisfy a fleeting curiosity of mine which you yourself are responsible for."

"With pleasure, sir."

"What prompted you, pray, to divine what I have hinted as to that young woman's failing? —for I am satisfied, that she is sincerely penitent now. Or," observing the other deliberate, "perhaps you have seen or known of her before."

"Oh, no, never before, sir," replied Mr. Magnus, modestly. "You see, the young woman chanced to touch me, or permit me to touch her, in passing, and—I sort of felt it. That was all."

The banker's interest was visibly increased.

"Ah, now I recall a former acquaintance with your name and services," he said. "You furnished some extraordinary revelations in the great forgery and embezzlement case of a few years ago, and were frequently in request as Magnus, the Touch Detective?"

The visitor simply bowed his acquiescence, and then said, abruptly:

"Let us proceed to business, sir, if you please. In addition to the outlines of the case, which my chief has imparted to me, I would like to question you as to certain particulars."

"Proceed. But in the first place, can I offer you a glass of wine and a cigar?"

"Neither, thank you. You are quite satisfied that the young man who was found dead by the bank safe was also the robber?"

"Satisfied! Why, he was dead before the massive doors, whose combination lock he had opened—his valise and even his pockets were already packed with the stolen cash. It was self-evident."

"We shall see about that. Who first gave the alarm?"

"Our cashier, Mr. Bartlow, who chanced to first enter the bank this morning at an early hour."

"Mr. Bartlow, the cashier, eh? An important officer in your bank, I suppose?"

"Next in importance to my own function, as president of the concern, certainly."

"And is it this gentleman's custom to first enter the bank in the morning at an early hour?"

"Hardly, as a matter of course. He was taking his constitutional stroll before breakfast when he noticed a gas-jet still burning in the vault room, and that a side window giving ingress thereto had been forced—was, in fact, wide open. So he clambered through it, and made the astounding discovery. Mr. Bartlow, sir," impressively, "is a gentleman of the highest character, possessing my utmost confidence."

"Oh, doubtless, doubtless. Still, sir, I shall assume the privilege of asking such questions as I choose."

"Right, very right. Proceed, then, Mr. Magnus."

Before, however, the next question could be asked, the girl, Norah, hurriedly re-entered the room, without knocking.

"Sir," she said to her master, with suppressed excitement, "Madame Renaud wishes me to say that the young missus has swooned again, and the doctor's been sent for."

CHAPTER II.

A RICH MAN'S HOUSEHOLD.

MR. GRANTBY hastily excused himself, and with an agitation that he made no attempt to conceal, he hurried from the room with the servant.

The detective, who was already forming his thoughts as to these matters, quietly took in his immediate surroundings with the swift, analytical observance that had become his second nature, as you might say.

The library, furnished with heavy black-walnut furniture, upholstered with dark red morocco, and gothic, richly carved book-cases, was a picture of the solid and tasteful comfort which is the product of wealth slowly acquired and

judiciously applied. Judging from his passage through the stately hall, the entire interior of the spacious, double house was doubtless similarly characterized by costly and substantial contentedness, without the slightest suggestion of ostentation or even sumptuousness in the outlay. And upon approaching the house he had been prepossessed by its plain but tasteful exterior, and the old-fashioned beauty of the large, well-kept grounds.

"Elegance without display—luxury with common sense—a house of contentment and plenty, happiness and congenial tastes—or should be," was the detective's mental comment. "How I should enjoy such a home as this, if even on a far grander scale! Who can this Madame Renaud be? Perhaps the housekeeper, since I understand the banker is a widower."

Here the door opened; there was the accompanying rustle of a woman's garments, and, as he rightly divined, the subject of his concluding meditations was before him.

A stately and attractive woman, still on the right side of forty apparently, a blonde, and on a very liberal scale, the new-comer was furthermore attractively dressed, though with a matronly suggestiveness that would have indicated her housekeeper's position, even without the bunch of keys that depended from her girdle in a business-like way.

"I hope monsieur will not be impatient," she said, in a very musical voice, and with a slightly foreign accent. "Mr. Grantby sent me to say that he will rejoin you almost immediately."

Carolus Magnus, the Touch Detective, had taken instant stock of the woman in his silent, imperceptible way, and to the following effect: "Madame Renaud, housekeeper; no one's fool, if not a deep and far-sighted schemer; her foreign accent altogether assumed; and more than likely altogether other than she seems. If I can only succeed in touching her."

"Never mind me, ma'm," was his audible response, and with an engaging smile flickering out of the gentle melancholy of his face. "I am wholly at Mr. Grantby's service and can await his convenience. But I do trust, ma'm," with quiet concern, "that it was nothing very serious that summoned him away so suddenly."

The woman had seated herself by a little table facing him, and deigned to appear somewhat prepossessed, though she had at first examined him with a criticalness which, however guarded or feminine, did not escape his attention.

"It was nothing serious at all," she replied, composedly. "Young ladies are apt to faint nowadays when excited or distressed—that is, some of them are."

"It was Mr. Grantby's daughter, ma'm, who had fainted, then?" with increased concern.

"Yes. You are the New York detective Mr. Grantby sent for, I presume?"

"The same."

"Little good you can do in this dreadful affair, I opine." And then, whether by design or not, the comely housekeeper gradually waxed confidential and communicative. "But why should it come into our household with its unpleasant grisliness?" she said, somewhat impatiently. "All the money will be recovered, and, apart from that, the tragedy is wholly a Maycourt, altogether an outside, affair. True, Miss Grace and the unhappy young man were at one time very intimate, perhaps in love with one another. But that was understood to be over and done. And if she had not exactly accepted as yet the attentions of Mr. Bartlow, the cashier—a superior and most magnificent gentleman—why, at all events, this intense concern over the young man's fate is scarcely proper, at least not in the best taste, in a young lady of Miss Grantby's social position and the strength of character she has heretofore been credited with. Ah," regretfully, "we manage better in Paris. But, dear me, monsieur," with a nervous little laugh, "what will you think of me, in my inferior position, being thus confidential and loquacious with you, a perfect stranger? It is too bad! I must be more discreet. But then, candor compels me to say that Mr. Grantby is somewhat responsible for his daughter's weakness—to express it mildly—by the example he sets for her. True, he liked the young fellow, and would doubtless have willingly been the making of him, if not deserted in the intention by the hypocritical ingrate's innate depravity, as illustrated by this horrible affair. But is that any reason for his suddenly renewed kindness for the bereaved widow, whom he is said to have have scarcely more than bowed to since she jilted him, or he jilted her, in their early life? Far more likely the latter, for just where her vaunted remains of good-looks are to be found is more than I could ever discover, or any one else, I fancy. But, *peste!* there I am running on again!" And Madame Renaud closed her handsome mouth with a sort of self-disciplining snap, while looking somewhat flustered and smoothing down her black silk apron.

She had, nevertheless, been secretly observing the effect of her words on her auditor with the keenest interest, as he was perfectly well aware, and doubtless with equal disappointment at the seeming indifference with which they had been received.

"Oh, don't mention it, ma'm," replied the de-

etective, a little weary. "Every family has its little history, I suppose."

And then, as she chanced to brush a magazine off the table at which she was sitting, he politely picked it up for her, and in doing so managed to touch her shapely white hand with his own.

He controlled a slight start, which seemed more or less instinctive or irresistible under certain of the 'touch' conditions, gave her a swift, hard glance, which was, however, unperceived, and then quietly resumed his seat.

"Yet another," said the odd expert to himself; "and a dangerous one at that! I wonder how many of them I am destined to be warned against in the 'case.'"

Then the door opened, and Mr. Grantby appeared, looking both disturbed and vexed.

Immediately behind him, attired for the street, and leaning on the arm of an elderly, professional-looking gentleman, doubtless the family physician, stood a tall, graceful young lady, of a singularly noble and characteristic brunette type of beauty. She was just now haggard and pale, however, though with a strong, resolved look in her suffering eyes and fine dark features.

The banker signed the detective to keep his seat, and hastily approached his housekeeper, who had instantly risen and turned, apparently in unaffected surprise.

"Grace insists on going to the Maycourts," he said, in a low voice, which was just audible to Magnus, sitting but a step or two apart, "and Doctor Beecham thinks it best not to thwart her further. I wish you would accompany them, Madame Renaud; and pray cut the visit as short as possible."

Madame Renaud bowed respectfully, and at once, without a word, joined the young lady and the physician at the door, which was forthwith closed behind them.

The brief glimpse which the detective had caught of that nobly beautiful and suffering youthful face had been enough.

"And this," he muttered to himself, "is the young woman in whose heart they would undertake to displace the image of her love for an unwelcome suitor. They are fools."

The banker dropped rather wearily into a chair, but when he heard the front door open and close, he looked up with a thorough resumption of his composure.

"Now, my dear sir," said he, in his business-like way, "if you can pardon my having quitted you so abruptly, though unavoidably, we will proceed where we left off."

CHAPTER III.

STRICKEN HEARTS.

"THE interruption was nothing," replied Magnus, in the quiet, gentle way that seemed most natural to him. "I was about to ask you, when you were compelled to excuse yourself so summarily, if the character and reputation of the young man, Randall Maycourt, were beyond suspicion up to this lamentable discovery?"

"Absolutely so!" exclaimed Mr. Grantby, energetically. "That is the wonder, the chief misery of it!" he struck the arm of his chair smartly with his open hand. "His habits were irreproachable, that I know—a model and affectionate son no less than a chivalrous brother to those dependent upon him, and now stricken to the dust by this terrible exposure and tragedy combined. And as for his probity, I would have indorsed it at any time with every dollar I possess."

"So! He was the chief bookkeeper in your banking-house, I believe?"

"Yes; and my most trusted subordinate—perhaps with the single exception of Mr. Bartlow, our cashier," this hastily, and as if by a sudden afterthought. "An invaluable young man, sir, an exceptional young man—until this appalling exposure—Could also perform either of the tellers' duties on occasion, and with signal ability. Ah, that is the misery of it, the amazement of it!"

"Quite unaccountable!"

"Quite, sir, quite! Unaccountable? It is simply amazing!"

"A combination lock, you say?"

"One of the latest patents."

"And he was all along acquainted with the secret of the combination?"

"Yes; it was known to but two others besides myself—to Randall Maycourt and to Mr. Bartlow."

"Still there must have been a key?"

"But one legitimate one, and that scarcely out of my individual custody, with my knowledge, for twenty minutes at a time—say in opening the money vault in the morning and closing it at night."

"And yet there was a duplicate?"

"Yes, the imitation key found on the robber's—the body of the misguided young man."

"How could the imitation have been secured?"

"Doubtless from a wax impression surreptitiously obtained from the original one in my possession." The banker mechanically produced the key, and held it in his hand. "I can think of no other way."

"That was most probably the way. So you feel morally sure that the young man was engaged

in robbing the vault at the time of being overtaken by the Destroyer?"

"Good heavens!" in genuine surprise; "how can I, or any one else with common sense, think otherwise?"

"Well," composedly, "perhaps those with uncommon sense might admit the possibility of a doubt."

"But bless me, sir, you astonish me—you a professional, too!"

"Do I?"

"Indeed, you do!" earnestly. "Why, under the circumstances, what loophole of escape is there from a *prima facie* conclusion as to the young man's guilt?—nailed by death red-handed to his own unmasking, as you might say!"

"Well, he might have been on the watch and detected another, for instance, and on death suddenly overcoming him—heart disease may result in death almost at any instant and without warning, as you must know, presuming such to have been the cause in this case—have been thus utilized by the real and detected criminal, as it were, for a secure cover of his own guilt."

"I never thought of that before," admitted the banker, slowly. "Still, isn't such a hypothesis very far-fetched?"

"Yes; but not impossible, or even improbable, for that matter."

"Another criminal, in your supposed case, would have thus been compelled to depart empty-handed. No cash had been abstracted save what was recovered from the person and valise of the dead body."

"But, in thus throwing his intended guilt upon an innocent man beyond the power of ever speaking up in his own behalf, the real criminal would thus have a freer field for his unsuspected future designs in the same direction."

"Humph! Your ordinary safe-breaker is not apt to relinquish a present bird in hand for a future bird in a very uncertain bush."

"In this supposition, it would have been no ordinary, but a decidedly extraordinary, safe-breaker. Besides, he might have gratified a revenge, or a personal end, in addition, by hopelessly blackening the character of his forever-speechless victim."

"Good heavens! but this would argue him—your supposititious burglar—as one of young Maycourt's business associates in the bank."

"Y-e-s," slowly. "In the bank, or elsewhere, or both."

"But there is no remaining man in the bank employment upon whom such a suspicion could possibly fasten."

"None?"

"Not one whatever!" And Mr. Grantby slapped the arm of his chair energetically, as he had done more than once before.

"Yet the dead clerk was equally beyond suspicion, as you are even eager to acknowledge."

"But there is the subsequent exposure—the indisputable evidence."

"No evidence—or rather testimony—is indisputable until *proved* as such, especially as against the voiceless dead."

"Oh, come now!" impatiently. "Who is there that could have played such a trick upon the dead youth?"

The detective looked at the banker with a steadfast gaze in his melancholy eyes.

"I don't know," he responded. "You should be better able to answer that question than I."

"Perhaps—like enough. But, look here: what revenge or personal end could have been wrought at the same time, as you suggest?"

"You ought also to know that better than I. Had Randall Maycourt *no* enemy nor ill-wisher?"

"Not one, that I am aware of."

"Nor rival—say in love?"

The banker changed countenance.

"Perhaps so—how should I know?" he managed to reply, with increased impatience. "Look here, Mr. Magnus, all this hair-splitting seems to me but a waste of breath and time. You must agree with me that, on the face of it, there can be no doubt of the unhappy young man's being stricken down in the commission of his crime."

"On the face of it, true. Well, say that I am agreed, then. All the abstracted cash was recovered, I believe?"

"Every dollar of it."

"What can you want with me, then, Mr. Grantby?"

The latter at once resumed his business-like air and manner.

"United States bonds on deposit with us to a large amount—twenty thousand dollars—are today found to be missing, and may have been abstracted days or even weeks ago. It is suggested that they may be somewhere concealed in Mrs. Maycourt's cottage, as the fruits of a prior crime on the part of her son."

"Suggested by Mr. Bartlow, your cashier, I presume?"

"Yes," in surprise. "How did you chance to know that?"

"Never mind—a mere guess, perhaps."

"Ah," the banker smiled, "I suppose I must be prepared for even shrewder and more intuitive divination on the part of so unique a professional as the 'Touch Detective.'"

"As you choose, sir," gravely. "As I understand it, then, your relations with the unfortunate young man's family remain altogether friendly?"

"More than that, sir!" emphatically. "The widowed mother is—is—" checking his eagerness—"a refined and worthy lady whom I have known long and most favorably; the sister a lovely and particularly fine young lady, my daughter's most intimate friend. I sympathize with them from the very bottom of my heart."

"I think I understand. You would have me discover if your suspicions are correct as to the concealment of the missing bonds on their premises, without further distressing the ladies with a knowledge that you entertain such suspicions at all?"

"Exactly; or nearly so, for I fear that they may already have guessed something of the sort. But you might, with your experience, devise means for prosecuting the search without their knowing it. Even after the funeral would do, for that matter."

"When is that to be?"

"Probably the day after to-morrow. I have already communicated with an undertaker on my own responsibility."

"Will there be an inquest?"

"It took place this morning—solely into the manner of death, as a matter of course; I have contrived to keep the associate attempt at robbery comparatively quiet thus far."

"That was very considerate in you, sir, permit me to say. What was the finding of the coroner's jury?"

"Heart disease."

The detective briskly rose.

"I shall ask you to take me to the Maycourt cottage now, sir," he said. "And, if convenient, I would like to make myself familiar with the actual scene of the tragedy in the bank before proceeding thither."

"Good!" And seeming greatly satisfied with the other's promptitude of manner and action, Mr. Grantby also rose. "We shall go at once. In the mean time I have given orders for your accommodation here in my house, and wish you to consider yourself as my privileged guest while you remain in Mount Kerton."

"Thank you, sir; I shall do so with pleasure."

After a brief visit to the interior of the bank they reached the Maycourt cottage, which occupied a pretty little garden site at but a short distance from the bank president's fine residence, and were forthwith admitted into the room in which the body was already laid out in the habiliments of the grave, for the undertaker had already made his initial visit.

Seated at the foot of the couch on which the body lay, their faces profoundly, piteously expressive of bitter heart-anguish and speechless woe, were the mother and sister of the dead man. The first agony of sobs and tears and lamentations was past, giving place to the dumb succeeding misery and desolateness, which are perhaps even more heart-rending to witness.

Their heads were for the most part bowed, their bosoms silently convulsed.

The pure blonde beauty of Miss Maycourt's face at once impressed the detective profoundly, in spite of its careworn haggardness and grief-stricken air. Bending at her side, sympathetically, sat Miss Grantby, the banker's daughter, her arm thrown protectingly around the graceful, bowed form, her dark beauty forming a strong contrast to that of her friend, her face expressive of scarcely less misery and emotion as her eyes rested on the composed, sheeted figure resting on the couch.

But the first frenzy of the widowed mother's grief—a most refined appearing woman of middle age she, of a noble order of comeliness, singularly well preserved—was not yet wholly subsided.

"Randall!" she occasionally murmured, through her dry, piteous sobs. "Randall! This, this, after all these years? Oh, my son, my son!"

CHAPTER IV. THE BANK CASHIER.

As the banker and his companion unobtrusively entered, however, two others, besides this grief-stricken trio, were observed as being present.

One was the physician, Dr. Beecham, who had escorted Miss Grantby to the place.

The other was a tall, splendidly-appearing, magnificently, even colossally proportioned florid man, of thirty-eight or forty, whose handsome face wore a secret air of annoyance over the lugubrious affair, in spite of its external look of deep concern.

"Is that large gentleman Mr. Bartlow, your cashier?" whispered Magnus to his companion.

The latter inclined his head in the affirmative, adding in a similar guarded tone: "I hardly expected finding him here at present, though I might well have done so. Trust big-headed, whole-souled Catesby Bartlow to be on hand on an occasion like this, even if poor Randall and his women-folk never would exactly take to him, somehow or other. Wait, and I will introduce you—you'll be glad to know Bartlow."

"Like enough, though perhaps not wholly for the gentleman's benefit!" was the detective's

mental comment, his solemn eyes still fixed on the florid cashier, as the latter approached the remote corner of the spacious room where they had remained standing, in obedience to a sign from Mr. Grantby. "So it seems that the unfortunate youth, even if leaving no enemy behind him, as our bank president declared, was not without his secret antipathies."

The introduction was accordingly made in whispered tones, the cashier's face lighting up with an expression of eager satisfaction as he extended his hand.

"This is, indeed, a pleasure," he murmured. "And I haven't a doubt that Mr. Magnus, with his reputation for penetration, will speedily throw light on what is still so mysterious in this—But, my dear sir, what can be the matter?" in unaffected surprise.

The detective had suddenly withdrawn his hand from the other's clasp, and was very pale, with a pained, startled look in his weird eyes.

"Don't mention it, I beg, sir," he quickly replied, smiling, and instantly recovering his composure. "A temporarily disabled finger—that was all. Ah, yes, as you suggest: I really hope to be of some service in the case."

And then, as a few commonplaces were exchanged, Mr. Bartlow seemed to forget the little incident altogether.

Here there was a fresh outburst on the part of the widow, and Mr. Grantby felt impelled to advance to where the body lay.

"Madeleine—Mrs. Maycourt—my friend!" he said, laying his hand gently on the disconsolate woman's shoulder; "it can't be helped now. Summon up your resolution—try to bear it more bravely."

"My God, Isaac, but I cannot!" wailed the widow. "Oh, why has he thus stricken my mother's heart? Randall, my true, my noble boy, dead, and with this cruel, this false accusation hanging over his name, his honor, and he incapable of vindicating himself, his lips mute in death!" Then there was a passionate outburst of tears.

The commiseration that remained in Mr. Grantby's face was now mixed with a sterner expression, as his eyes wandered somewhat resentfully to the inanimate figure on the couch, with its covered face and sheeted contour.

Here two other men silently entered the room and stood respectfully, observantly apart.

They were, as the New York detective speedily learned, Mr. Harker, the lawyer to the bank, and Captain Vanderhoof, the chief of the local police.

Then, addressing himself to the physician, Mr. Grantby spoke, his voice dry, cold and hard, as if by a forced effort.

"You were present at the inquest, Dr. Beecham," he said. "Did its result agree with your private opinion as to the cause of this wretch—this unfortunate young man's death?"

The physician assumed a superior look, and gave a little professional cough behind his hand.

"Save on immaterial technical points, yes, without a doubt," he replied.

While the sobs of the mother continued in a muffled way, the banker again gazed on the motionless figure of his whilom clerk in a curious, doubtful manner.

It was a suggested feeling that was reflected by others present. For, in spite of the apparently self-evident fact—the motionlessness and rigidity of the sheeted form, the distressing environments—it seemed that the ghastly sense or actuality of death was somehow wanting or incomplete. Even the detective, though a perfect stranger there, experienced this dim sense, and perhaps more pronouncedly than any one else, by reason of his intense sensitiveness to emanations and impressions.

"Of course," continued the banker, again turning with his strange look to the physician, "I suppose there can be no doubt, no sort of doubt, as to the unfortunate young man being really dead?"

"Of course not!" Dr. Beecham was essentially corporeal, or at least not one of the impressional sort. "Why, the inquest has passed upon that."

"But I have much confidence in you, personally and professionally, doctor. That fact you would also certify to, as the coroner's jury have done, without any autopsy whatever?"

The physician—a rotund man, with a big head, a confident bearing and a high professional reputation in the populous community—looked yet more surprised.

"Randall Maycourt is certainly dead," he said, sententiously, and yet with a lowered voice, as out of respect for the women's feelings, "and his funeral is already arranged, as you must know. He died from valvular disease of the heart, complicated by an associate cerebral affection. I was his family physician, as you are aware. It was a disease of whose presence I had long since warned him. Doubtless his death was accelerated at the last by some sudden and violent nervous shock." He added significantly, though in a still more subdued voice: "A sudden fright, or alarm, even if imaginary or causeless, would have been enough."

Here Magnus, the detective, noiselessly, almost unheededly, crossed the floor, and stood near the head of the shrouded form, whence his

own face being comparatively in the shadow, he could see and note the expression of the cashier's features across the interval.

In spite of his accustomed self-control, the contact of Bartlow's hand clasp, in the touch-test, had given him a thrill of warning so malignant and so painful that he had dissembled its effects only with the utmost exertion of his strong will.

"God's will be done!" continued Mr. Grantby, with strong emotion. "Lament as we may the loss of our young friend and associate as we formerly knew and believed in him—honest, gallant and brave—let us, nevertheless, be not unthankful that His providence saw fit to efface him from existence before his criminal attempt could be fulfilled, with all the misery that it would have entailed."

CHAPTER V.

A SYMPATHETIC DETECTIVE.

THE bank president's words, at such a time and place, were both unfortunate and fortunate, in that they could not but wound, however unintentionally, the already overburdened sensibilities of the stricken relatives of the dead, and yet precipitated the proposed secret search for the missing bonds out of obscurity into the cold, matter-of-fact light of day.

Here Mrs. Maycourt, who had thus far been so broken-spirited and prostrated, looked up with a sudden fierceness of resolution and energy that was an astonishment, no less than a revelation, to every one.

"Sir—Isaac Grantby!" she exclaimed, proudly, untremulously, and with a voice that fairly rung through the room! "whatever you, or whatever that—that man," she pointed sternly and witheringly to Catesby Bartlow, the cashier "may say or think, and however appearances may have witnessed against him, I shall never, never believe that my dear son was a thief, even in the remotest intention or temptation! Have I not known him as only a mother can know her child? I solemnly declare, I call Heaven as my witness, that Randall Maycourt was a true man, a loving son, a scrupulously honorable, God-fearing Christian to the end!"

She had risen, erect and firm, while speaking. Now her daughter and Miss Grantby, as if stimulated by her example, also rose, one on each side of her, an arm of each gently encircling her form, their lovely faces and eyes reflecting the proud light, the vindicating spirit for the speechless dead, that seemed to have transfigured an image of weakness and desolation into something heroic and grand.

Here there was a slight rustling sound apart, and the keen-eyed but seemingly self-effacing Touch Detective, upon whom not an iota or a suggestion of the strange scene was lost, glanced to one of the deep-set, voluminously curtained window-spaces directly opposite to where he was standing.

He had temporarily forgotten that Madame Renaud, and the banker's housekeeper, had accompanied Miss Grantby and the medical man to the cottage.

There she now was, abruptly disclosed, erect in the window-space, and suddenly so interestedly observant of the painful scene that was passing, and especially, it would seem, of the effect of the widow's words and action upon Mr. Grantby, as to be heedless of aught else.

No one except the detective particularly noted the woman's presence now, or perhaps, which was more probable, all but he had been already indifferently aware of it.

Mrs. Maycourt's defiant bitterness seemed to rise rather than subside with the occasion, as if stimulated and emboldened by the words which had already been wrung from her.

"Oh, you needn't mind my feelings nor my daughter's, Isaac Grantby—you needn't further disguise the motive of your present visit here, together with these heartless or hypocritical men!" she continued, with renewed vehemence. "I have got wind of what you further suspect—its whisper penetrated even through my misery and heart-break—and I divined at a glance that the young man who entered with you was a detective-officer. Little good may it do you, however, when there is nothing more to discover! Cheating appearances, falsely incriminating circumstances—contrived by deadly and hateful conspiracy, for aught I know to the contrary," wildly, and with a fleeting resentful glance apparently for Mr. Bartlow's special benefit, "have wrought their worst on the life and reputation of my victimized son, who lies dead before you!" She closed with a sob, which was, nevertheless, heroically forced back.

The cashier's face assumed a look of profound amazement, and then, slightly elevating his brows, he merely bowed his head.

As for Mr. Grantby, after a genuinely deprecating gesture, he seemed to steel his heart afresh, as if more or less resenting what he considered the injustice or unreasonableness of the widow's passionate implications.

"Wild words, ma'm, wild words!" he replied, with a cold sort of gentleness. "But your sufferings are naturally poignant; it is not strange, perhaps, that you should somewhat forget yourself."

Both the widow's daughter and Miss Grantby

sought to draw her back into her seat, though evidently sympathizing to the utmost in her emotion, if not in the validity of her hinted charges, but she was not quite ready to be repressed as yet.

"I do not forget myself, sir," she cried, "when I speak the truth, the promptings of my mother's heart! There he lies, the victim of as base and cunning a plot as ever did manly truth and honor to ruin and death. I would swear to it before the Most High! Make no secret of your proposed search for the missing property that you pretend to believe to be concealed on these premises—hypocrites!" with a desperately disdainful glance, that included the banker himself, the friend of her youth, no less than the cashier. "Oh," raising her arms over the couch with a despairing wail, "my son, my son!"

She made a movement as if to throw herself upon the inanimate form, but controlled herself by an exceptional effort of the mind and will.

Then she quietly submitted to being reseated, the hard, defiant look, however, deepening in her grief-stricken, tear-stained face.

"This is too much," exclaimed Mr. Grantby, himself losing patience at last. "Madeleine—madam—you are cruelly unjust. I had to the full as much confidence in your unhappy son as you yourself could have had."

Mrs. Maycourt managed to smile—a terribly piteous and ghastly smile, to be sure, but with a taunting disbelief in it that did not fail to harden or exasperate him yet more.

"So be it, then," he said. "If the entire miserable affair must be informally reviewed again, in justification of Mr. Bartlow and myself, before these persons, who are as yet ignorant or but superficially aware of the facts, you have but yourself and your injurious words to reproach for it, ma'm."

His daughter made a gesture.

"Father," she murmured, appealingly, "not now again, please!"

"Grace, my dear, I request your silence. You are only here as against my advice, please to remember."

Then the banker turned to the cashier in his most peremptory, business-like manner.

"Mr. Bartlow," he said, "pray repeat your story of the astounding discovery as made by you soon after daybreak this morning."

Mr. Bartlow cast a sort of deprecating glance in the direction of Miss Grantby, as it seemed to the detective, and then still hesitated a little, as was perhaps but natural, before recounting his story in obedience to this injunction.

Magnus was yet standing, unheededly, close to the head of the bed, and now, during the brief expectant interest incidental to this momentary hesitation on the part of the cashier, he gently raised the sheet, and placed his hand against the forehead concealed by it.

The touch-test again! not upon the living, but on the dead!

No matter. As he swiftly withdrew his hand, and with a far different sort of thrill than he had yet felt in that day's experience, a tinge of color came into his pale cheeks, combined with a startled look of wonder, perhaps of joy, in his dark eyes.

As he looked cautiously around to see if his action had been perceived, he saw both Grace Grantby and Ada Maycourt regarding him curiously—the latter, in addition, with a look of yearning interest and solicitude, or might it be a suddenly conceived trustfulness in her beautiful blue eyes that somehow set his heart to beating with a sensation altogether new to him.

He cast down his own eyes and waited patiently, while thinking many new, strange thoughts.

Mr. Bartlow still hesitated.

"It is a simple enough story," he said, looking at the banker pleadingly, it seemed, "and I have already made it known. You deem it absolutely necessary, sir, that I should repeat it?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Grantby, with forced harshness, "I wish it. Especially," he looked at the widow, with a flashing return of his first commiseration for her, "as there does not seem to be any objection offered."

Mrs. Maycourt steadied her attitude and voice, while Madame Renaud leaned forward to regard her with a hard look that struck the detective as something even more significantly malignant than a frown.

"There is none whatever on my part," said Mrs. Maycourt, resignedly.

CHAPTER VI.

MAKING FRIENDS.

THUS prompted and urged, Mr. Bartlow, the magnificent-appearing cashier of the Mount Kerton Bank, accordingly began the repetition of his tale.

"I had retired rather late last night," he said, "after spending a rather agreeable evening at Father Ball's." [Father Ball was the jovial Episcopal clergyman of the town, very high church, a rich and childless widower, who was more than suspected of a taste for whisky, good-living, and hours somewhat uncanonical.] "But, nevertheless, I arose at my usual hour, a little before broad day, and set out for my constitutional before-breakfast stroll.

"When returning home, and on passing the bank—by the merest chance, it would seem, though I have since thought that there might have been something fatalistic in the coincidence—I noticed that there seemed to be a light in the office in which the safe is located. The window at that side, as you know," he turned to Mr. Grantby, who gravely nodded, "is but a few feet from the ground. In fact, I have more than once pointed out how easy it would be for a robber to effect an entrance in that way."

"True, true!" interposed Mr. Grantby, nodding again. "I know you have."

The cashier went on:

"To my surprise, I found the window unlatched. I opened it. Whoever was within was too much absorbed in his occupation to notice what I did.

"I looked through the open window, and saw that some one was in the inner office, but who it was I could not at first perceive. Using the utmost precaution against causing an alarm, I climbed through the window and went in.

"For the instant, the disclosure that I made all but took my breath away. I would almost as soon have expected to find myself in such an incriminating position as the man before me. A man was rifling the money-vault. Directly I entered he looked up; it was Randall Maycourt. When he saw me, he turned ashen pale, staggering back and pressing his hand to his breast, without a sound. Then he gave the most awful, the most terror-stricken scream I think I ever heard, and fell down—dead!"

The narrator's voice trembled, and, taking out his handkerchief, he wiped his brow and face, which had become slightly pallid, but perspiring.

"Just so soon as I could recover my presence of mind," he then resumed, "I rushed back to the window and called for help. I had felt instinctively that the young man was dead, even without venturing to examine his form where it had fallen.

"A constable who heard came in response to my cries. Together we examined the room. That is all I have to say—in fact, I positively refuse to say more." Mr. Bartlow wiped his forehead again. "I only wish from the depths of my heart," with a deeply commiserating look at Mrs. Maycourt, which, however, struck the detective as being assumed, "that I had not to say so much."

The brief recital had been listened to in profound silence and with the most intense interest.

"But there is more that *must* be said," observed Mr. Grantby, determinedly. "In the grate were found the half-consumed fragments of the cash accounts, which, if they had been suffered to continue in existence, would inevitably have betrayed the crime, even if the criminal had lived to otherwise cover up his tracks successfully. The safe was wide open. The duplicate or imitation key (whose original is scarcely ever out of my personal custody) with which the combination lock had been mastered, was found sticking in the lock. The cash contents of the vault had been abstracted in part. A valise and the dead man's pockets were found to be literally stuffed with greenbacks, to the value of over ten thousand dollars. On his desk was found a bag containing twenty-five hundred dollars in gold. All this, as a matter of course, was recovered on the spot."

"But United States bonds, on deposit for safe-keeping, to the amount of twenty-thousand dollars, are found to be gone. They may have been missing days or weeks previously, and undoubtedly, since not found together with the stolen cash, they must have been purloined by the wretched young man upon some prior occasion."

"If by that young man at all," interposed a calm, soft voice.

All looked at Magnus, the detective, from whom the words had proceeded; but he merely inclined his head, and, with no change in his modest, unassuming demeanor, did not seem to look anywhere in particular, while losing sight of nothing.

To his secret gratification, Ada Maycourt threw him a glance of swift, surprised gratefulness, while both her mother and her young lady friend raised their eyes with a pleased look.

Madame Renaud's comely face assumed a yet harder look, while Bartlow both started and frowned, and Mr. Grantby looked far from agreeably surprised.

"Ah, yes, exactly, Mr. Magnus," the latter managed to reply. "But, surely, you will scarcely deny that, under the circumstances, we should naturally look to the one source of criminality for our still missing property?"

"Naturally, yes—provided the *true* source of criminality is discovered beyond a shadow of doubt. Even then it would not *certainly* follow. You will excuse my interruption, I hope, sir. But I have had too much experience in unraveling the intricacies and *motives* of crime to invariably accept hasty evidence, of however *prima facie* a character in *seeming*, as conclusively incriminative. But, proceed, sir," with a slight wave of the hand, which the women, at least, now remarked to be as white and delicate as a fine lady's.

Few men, even the best, like to have their strong preconceptions upset or antagonized.

The good president of the Mount Kerton Bank began to fear that he might not be so well pleased with his freshly-secured New York detective as he had at first supposed.

However, he went on, without more than moderately betraying his impatience:

"We have, then, strong reasons for suspecting, and even inferring, that these missing bonds were likewise taken by Randall Maycourt and concealed. Where, we are still to find out, if possible; and I regret to inform you, Mad—Mrs. Maycourt, that your supposition was correct. This professional gentleman, Mr. Magnus, is here in the bank's service, prepared to search this house thoroughly to that end."

"Sir," replied Mrs. Maycourt, with the sad dignity and composure with which she had at least succeeded in supplanting the more pronounced manifestations of her distress, "you need make no apology. The gentleman can proceed forthwith or at his leisure in searching the house from cellar to garret. He will find nothing, I am most confident, that was not righteously my poor son's own, or what now belongs to my daughter and myself."

As the visitors for the most part began at once to take their departure, the banker drew Magnus to one side.

"It is late in the day, and dinner will be awaiting us in an hour," he said, with a complete return to his original geniality. "You will not forget, my dear sir, that you are to consider yourself my house-guest while this business lasts."

"Thank you kindly, sir," replied the detective, "I shall not forget. In the mean time, pray leave me here briefly to my own devices."

"Good! Nothing like making some sort of a beginning without delay. Remember, dinner at six, sharp."

The banker then approached the ladies—now all joined together in a group by the door—fearing that his daughter would demur at even temporarily deserting her friends as yet. But much to his satisfaction Grace, after kissing both Ada and her mother undemonstratively, at once took Madame Renaud's arm on seeing him approach.

"I am quite ready, papa," she said. "But you must let me run over here again for a short time this evening."

Her father was sufficiently content as it was, but if he had been a little quicker eyed while exchanging words with the detective, he would have perceived a little episode that might have somewhat moderated his satisfaction.

It was that of Mr. Bartlow lingeringly delaying his departure in the hope of being Miss Grantby's escort back to her home, and being summarily, if not altogether crushingly, dismissed by a frowning look of positive dislike and aversion in the lovely dark face, such as was a decidedly uncomfortable revelation for him, though, apart from possessing her father's favor, he had felt himself none too secure in the young lady's good graces theretofore.

A moment later Carolus Magnus was left alone with Mrs. Maycourt and her daughter.

CHAPTER VII.

MAGNUS IS MORE OR LESS MYSTERIOUS.

MRS. MAYCOURT was the first to speak, her daughter in the mean time lowering her eyes.

It was easy to see that, now that they were comparatively alone with their dead once more, the force of their crushing bereavement was again gathering them under its sable wing, bearing up with what courage and fortitude they might.

"Sir," said the widow, somewhat timidly, "my poor house is at your disposal. Where and how, permit me to ask, would you prefer to begin your search?"

Instead of answering, the detective roused himself out of a reverie into which he seemed to have fallen, and looked at her strangely.

"Madam," he said, altogether irrelevantly, but with the profoundest earnestness and respect, "I am going to take the great liberty of preferring a strange request."

"Request?"—in surprise, the young lady also looking up wonderingly. "To me?"

"Yes, ma'm. It is this: will you permit me to look upon the face of the motionless occupant of yonder couch? To whom else could I make such a request than to the mother of him who was, I am confident, a dutiful and affectionate son, a faultless brother and a capital, honest good fellow?"

The haggard faces of both mother and daughter flushed gratefully; and yet, what could it all mean?

Accepting their silence as an assent to his request, the detective reverently stepped to the head of the couch and laid aside the cloth concealing the countenance of its silent occupant.

They were handsome and honest-appearing lineaments, the lineaments of that white, upturned face upon which the detective gazed—at first with a slight start, whether of recognition or otherwise it would be hard to say, and then long and earnestly; the face that almost any one, at least any one not aware of the deplorable closing event of its life-history, would have announced as having been the index of a frank and manly nature, an honest and loyal soul.

Yet the eyes were wide and staring, with a strained, agonized look into the rigid features, and as yet there was not the faintest suggestion of the expiration of that peaceful, uncorrupting initial stage.

"The first dark day of nothingness,
The last of danger and distress,
Before decay's effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers."

What a strange sort of man this Mr. Magnus, the New York detective was! at least so the two forlorn women could not help thinking.

Having touched the marble forehead lightly with the back of his hand, he gently reached down under the cerements and seemed to place his hand over the heart of the body.

Then, reverently replacing the cloth over all, he advanced to them again with the most undecipherable look on his face imaginable, and not a funereal or lugubrious look, either—that was about all they could tell of it.

"Have you masculine friends in abundance and at need?" he asked, very gently. "If not, I should like to convenience you by sitting up with the—the remains over night—that is, after taking dinner with Mr. Grantby, according to invitation."

"You are very, very good, sir," replied the still mystified widow, with another grateful flush, which was more than reflected by her daughter, "but, there is really no need. We have, fortunately, many old and kind friends, some of them near neighbors. Hark!" there was a slight noise in the passage without, and she turned to Ada. "Doubtless that is Mr. Johnson and his two sons already at hand, in accordance with their kind promise."

Miss Maycourt promptly stepped out the hall, and quickly returned, with an inclination of her head.

"They will wait," she said, in a low, sad voice.

It was the first time Magnus had heard her voice, and he instantly thought it the sweetest and gentlest he had ever heard.

"I shall hardly detain you another minute," he said, taking up his hat.

"But you haven't intimated, sir," observed the widow, "where or how you would begin your search of the premises."

But the detective had managed to fall into another momentary reverie, or fit of abstraction, out of which he only roused himself to say:

"I have understood that the funeral is fixed for day after to-morrow, ma'm?"

She signified an affirmative.

"Pray don't consider me officious in what I am about to say," with sudden and hurried brusqueness. "You will at least, I hope, accept my offer to convenience you by watching here to-morrow night?" A puzzled nod of assent. "Thanks. In the mean time take my advice, as I am not unfamiliar with such melancholy matters. The undertaker or his assistants will come again between now and then, as a matter of course. Insist—nay, demand that no ice, or other preservative means, shall be used. This exceptionally cool summer weather will doubtless continue, so that there will be no need. Ladies, I shall now wish you good-evening. Condolences are rather empty forms, even when offered with the best and most honest intent. Still, I can't help saying that I feel for you in your bereavement"—he smiled strangely—"deeply, earnestly."

He was actually going, when Mrs. Maycourt stopped him.

"You will not begin your professional search of the house until to-morrow, then, I presume?"

"Search?" absent-mindedly, whether real or assumed. "What search, ma'm?"

"You seem oddly forgetful, sir," said the widow, with a fluttering little smile. "Why, for the stolen or missing bonds, which Mr. Grantby is so confident—"

"Oh! But, bless you, my dear madam, the banker is a good deal of a fool in this respect. I have not had the remotest intention of making any search here, though, of course, this is strictly between ourselves. Will you allow me?" He extended his hand somewhat diffidently.

Mrs. Maycourt impulsively pressed it, with suffused eyes and a trembling lip.

"Sir, may God bless you!" she said, a little brokenly. "Your considerateness is no less grateful than unexpected."

"Don't mention it," indifferently. "I am called the Touch Detective, and I seldom or never make any mistakes. You must trust me, madam."

Then as the younger woman also placed her pretty hand unhesitatingly in his, he slightly flushed, looking into her sweet, though tear-red eyes with a world of sympathy and gentleness.

With a simple, old-time courtesy, he raised it to his lips in making his parting obeisance, and was at the door.

"One more word of advice," he said, looking at them both steadily, even brightly. "Don't be too unhappy—*Hope!*"

Then he was gone.

"What a singular young man!" exclaimed Ada Maycourt, for the one moment forgetful of

the stark figure on the couch. "I can't make anything out of him."

"Neither can I," said her mother, with a slight shiver, as the chill of the dread presence in the semi-darkened room again came over her, with all its unrelieved woefulness. "Let us not keep Mr. Johnson and his sons waiting."

As for the detective, he reached the banker's house just in time for dinner.

It was an excellent, but not particularly lively repast, Miss Grantby having excused herself from coming down on the antiquated plea of headache, and Madame Renaud taking her place at the head of the table, where the banker and his detective-guest were the only other occupants.

"I asked Bartlow to join us," said Mr. Grantby, a little grumbly, while carving the joint, "thinking it might enliven us up a bit. But somehow he had fallen into the most unaccountable surly humor, and could not find it in his magnificence to accept."

Mr. Magnus smiled gently.

He had almost nothing to say, and when he spoke at all was apparently careful to avoid all further reference to "the case," for which his host, already weary and fagged over the affair, was not altogether unthankful, so that the meal passed in comparative silence.

The handsome housekeeper, on her part, was no less reticent, scarcely opening her lips to speak throughout the repast. She seemed to have attained to a wholesome regard for the New York detective's penetration.

Nevertheless, there were many little intimations, as existing between the banker and herself, which did not escape his reflective notice.

"The housekeeper's discontent with the refined Mrs. Maycourt is not without cause," he thought. "The spurious Frenchwoman is fully determined to win the bank president for herself. Perhaps that is why she is here."

After dinner the gentlemen took a stroll in the gardens and grounds, Mr. Grantby being especially proud of his conservatories, and fond of exhibiting their treasures.

The gentlemanly detective dutifully listened and admired.

Then, having artfully changed the subject, so as not to appear impolitely abrupt, he suddenly asked:

"Mr. Bartlow is a bachelor, I presume?"

"Yes."

"Where does he live, pray?"

The banker had shrugged his shoulders a little, and then remembering what was to be expected, had settled down to a good-natured indulgence of his companion's inquisitiveness.

"Bartlow has handsome quarters over a shoe-shop on an adjoining street," he replied.

"A magnificently distinguished-looking man!"

"And just as fine a fellow as he looks," said the banker, warming up at once, as seemed to be his custom when the cashier was under discussion. "Something of a sporting man, or high-roller, as you might say, in his day, like enough," smilingly, as if to disarm a possible intimation to such effect in advance, "but now thoroughly settled down in his devotion to business."

"Ah! thorough business man, eh?"

"I should say so, who ought to know!" emphatically. "In fact, Bartlow's is about the surest and most comprehensive business mind I think I have ever encountered. He is a sort of a wonder, and I am not the only one that thinks so. Correct to a hair in his accounts, intuitively unerring in his judgment of affairs, and lightning-like in his decisions as to an investment—whether to take hold or hold off. Has already saved the bank many a blunder. In fact," conclusively, "we are reasonably proud of Bartlow."

CHAPTER VIII.

PRELIMINARY PIPE-LAYING.

THE banker spoke sententiously, as if quite certain that any further criticism or captious inquiry would be summarily set to rest on the subject of a paragon whom he could conscientiously afford to extol so unsparingly.

But he knew little of Magnus, the mind-master, and his methods, as yet.

"Humph! quite a financial Bayard, 'without fear and without reproach,' no doubt," commented the latter, but so gently as to make it doubtful whether he spoke sarcastically or not. "He is—but of course, my dear sir, you will bear in mind my privilege to be inquisitive *ad libitum* at will!"

"Oh, of course."

"Mr. Bartlow is an Englishman?"

"By birth, yes; but by nature and attainments a cosmopolitan—a man of the world. However, I do not mind admitting that I know comparatively little of his antecedents before coming to us."

"How long has he been with your bank?"

"Three years altogether; the last two as cashier."

"But doubtless with suitable recommendations from abroad?"

"Oh, certainly; from both London and Liverpool, where he had had confidential relations with various banking institutions. I'll show you some of the letters presently, if you wish. Noth-

ing could well be more highly commendatory, as I think you will allow."

"Thanks; yes, they will doubtless prove interesting. Nothing pleases me more than to see a real sterling man deservedly vouches for. But—did I not understand you to say that but little of Mr. Bartlow's antecedents was known to you?"

"Oh," a little impatiently, "I meant individually and as to his family; which, however, of course they would attach more importance to in the old country than we do."

"Yes."

"Still, we know him to be a perfect gentleman and a capital good fellow. Every one knows that; which ought to suffice, I should say."

"Certainly, certainly!" with much earnestness. "Ah! A fine-looking lady, that housekeeper of yours, Mr. Grantby."

"You're right," with growing curtness.

"Been with you long?"

"Two years, or more."

"I don't know when I have seen a woman of statelier presence."

"She gives satisfaction—in most things."

"Recommended for the position by Mr. Bartlow? if I might hazard the guess."

Darkness had fallen, and they were seated in a rustic path bench, just under one of the lighted house-windows, which served to sufficiently dispel the gloom, the summer air being agreeably cool.

The banker felt himself becoming nettled, and thrust his hands deep into his trowsers pockets in his determination not to betray it.

"Odd, but you're not far from the mark, my friend," he replied, slowly, "though 'recommended' isn't exactly the word. Bartlow merely heard of the lady as being competent and wanting the place, and suggested the fact. Her recommendations were her own, chiefly from noble or refined families formerly employing her in various responsible capacities in France, Madame Renaud's native country."

"Ah! a genuine Frenchwoman, eh?"

"She says she is, and I've no reason to doubt her word."

"Doubtless a widow?"

"Hadn't you better ask her? However, it is generally understood that she is that."

Under cover of the semi-darkness the detective smiled imperturbably.

"A fine woman!" he repeated. "Should think your daughter might find her no less congenial as a companion and guide than as a housekeeper."

"Ha! Well, she does help Grace furbish up with her music and foreign languages. Now," sarcastically, "couldn't you turn your inquisitorial batteries upon my daughter herself, by way of a change?"

"Sir," observe the detective, with velvety dignity, as you might say, "pray understand that I never respond to sarcasm in kind."

"Oh, you don't? Grace herself has doubtless her little earthworks and rifle-pits of concealment in her past that might be worth surprising, if not storming. Odd if she hasn't, being an American girl of twenty, if a day."

"The young lady will certainly retain most of them intact, so far as I am concerned."

"What the devil, man!" Mr. Grantby gave a nervous laugh. "Can you blame me for losing patience somewhat? Here you are pumping me as to this, that and the other—ferreting here, there and everywhere, save where the real game is run to cover, and yet without a word as to the actual case in hand!"

"Excuse me for saying it, but you are obtuse. I haven't for an instant lost sight of the case in hand, nor put a single query that was not prompted with a view to its final and successful elucidation."

"Well, you have a devilish odd, roundabout way of proving it."

"It is my way, and if you don't like it our connection may be severed on the spot."

The detective's manner was no more pronounced, his speech no more excitable than before, and yet there was a distinctly implied sense of something stern or unusual in both, as if impressive of the fact that "the velvet scabbard hid a sword of steel."

Mr. Grantby moved a little uncomfortably in his seat and reflected. While he honestly could not understand or appreciate the detective's methods, he was sufficiently impressed by the man's quiet intellectuality and slumbering force in the abstract, as it were, to shrink from breaking in with him so soon.

"We oughtn't to quarrel, you and I," he said, with blunt earnestness. "At all events, I don't want to. Have another cigar?"

"With all my heart!" with an easy laugh; and the threatened breach was healed, or nearly so.

"You see, my dear Magnus," resumed the banker, still a little stubbornly, "you can hardly blame me for not seeing things with your eyes, especially since you withhold your confidence from me, in whole or in part."

"Of course, of course, my dear sir! The most natural thing in the world. Say no more about it."

"Nor can you blame me for failing to understand, you know, how the deuce my housekeeper's or Mr. Bartlow's antecedents can have anything to do with this case, when the criminality

of the dead bookkeeper seems so absolutely, I may say so staringly, beyond all possibility of doubt."

"Not at all. But you will understand all in good season, trust me for that."

"Thanks, thanks!" still a little grumbly. "In the mean time, I shall strive to possess my soul in patience to the best of my ability, I suppose."

"An excellent resolution, my dear sir! A prime cigar, this, by the way. A Reina?"

"No, a second Partaga. I prefer the brand, as being the milder of the two. But look here, Magnus, tell me this much. Am I to understand that you still entertain grave doubts of young Maycourt's guilt?"

"Decidedly so!"

"Well, well, well! And how soon do you suppose you can convince me of that?"

The detective reflected a moment, and then replied:

"I don't suppose anything about it. Most assuredly, I shall convince you within less than thirty-six hours."

"What! you can really promise that?"

"I can and do." The detective rose. "Now, if you have no objection, suppose you show me some of those letters that recommended Mr. Bartlow so highly."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LETTERS.

THEY went into the library, which had been lighted up for some time as if in expectancy of being required for an evening chat sooner or later.

Here Mr. Grantby at once proceeded to unlock and open the lower drawer of a very massive black-walnut secretary that occupied a conspicuous place in a corner of the room.

A moment's inspection, and then he looked up with a blank face.

"They're gone!" he exclaimed.

"What! are you quite sure?" asked the detective, though he did not seem to be particularly surprised.

"Yes, yes!" excitedly. "The drawer is quite empty—see! and I devoted it exclusively to the letters of that correspondence, I was so proud of them on Bartlow's account."

He rung the bell; Norah Walsh, the girl, appeared.

She looked startled on being told of the missing property, as was but natural, no doubt, in view of past charges that had been forgiven her.

"Och, sir!" she said, pitifully: "I never knew, belayve me, even what was in the drawer."

"Don't be needlessly alarmed," said Mr. Grantby, kindly. "The letters were of no intrinsic value, though important. Who has been in this room since dinner?"

"It was I myself, sir, to light up, sir."

"No one else?"

"Not that I know of. But yes, sir; now I think of it, I saw the housekeeper enter the room and come out again soon after you and the gentleman stepped into the garden."

"Send her to me, please."

Mr. Grantby turned to the detective after the girl had hurried away.

"Of course, I can't help recalling Norah's former fault," he said, "though I can't imagine what temptation the letters could have offered her."

"Set your mind to rest as to her," replied the detective, easily. "If the letters have been stolen, it was not the girl who stole them, and it was not through an idea that they might be valuable."

"Why, then?"

"Perhaps because they were valueless," was the mystifying rejoinder. "But, we shall see." And here Madame Renaud entered.

She seemed greatly surprised, on being questioned, couldn't imagine what had become of the missing letters, and, in fact, had never known of their existence.

"She had never even touched the secretary," she said, save to dust it off occasionally; and had never seen the inside of it save when the banker had chanced to let down the lid in her presence.

Had the letters contained money, or anything of great value? And then she suddenly turned on poor Norah, who had followed her, with a severely questioning, not to say accusatory, look, which about completed the girl's confusion.

The banker now pretended to make light of the affair. The letters had perhaps been inadvertently disturbed or mislaid. He merely thought they might have come under the housekeeper's notice when she was in the room, as Norah had said, a short time previously.

No; Madame Renaud had merely taken the liberty to temporarily appropriate one of the illustrated magazines from the table yonder. Here it was; she had even retained it in her hand when hurriedly obeying the summons as conveyed by Norah.

That was the end of it, Mr. Grantby said. The letters would like enough turn up unexpectedly some time or other. And the women were accordingly dismissed the room.

"It's very strange, the disappearance of those letters," said the banker, ponderingly. "There were quite a number—more than half-filling that shallow drawer. What did you mean, Magnus, by suggesting that they might have been abstracted because of an impression that they were of no value?"

"Oh, persons—women, especially—are so apt to snatch up anything about the house nowadays, you know, to kindle a fire, make into curl-papers, or something of the sort. Still, the lock would have had to be forced, eh?"

"Not necessarily. Almost any stray key of the appropriate size would serve for that lock."

"It is very strange," repeated Mr. Grantby, knitting his brows; and then he suddenly brightened up. "Hold on!" he said; "I may very likely have retained one or two of the letters among my other papers inside the desk here."

He let down the lid, and, after a careful search, was so fortunate as to discover two of the letters, though of somewhat minor importance, he said.

Magnus read them with seeming carelessness, but with a real criticalness of examination as to their chirography and composition which at once confirmed a secret suspicion he had entertained from the first.

In subject-matter the letters were highly commendatory—in fact, overdone, and to the extent of being panegyrical. In form, he speedily satisfied himself that both letters, though dated from different banking houses—the one in London, the other in Liverpool—were the work of one mind and one hand, cleverly varied—were, in other words, cunning forgeries.

"Those are very flattering recommendations," said the detective, returning the letters to Mr. Grantby, with a smile. "Only an exceptionally valuable man could deserve them. Mr. Bartlow must be an exceedingly fortunate and—clever man of business."

"Ha! what did I tell you?" cried the banker, becomingly delighted. "I knew you would say so. And these letters are not a patching, in gist and tone, to those that are so mysteriously missing."

He continued in the same vein, and then ordered in some wine and biscuits, soon after the discussion of which Magnus, on expressing a wish to retire, was shown to his room, with a cheery good-night at parting from his host.

The room assigned to the detective was a commodious and agreeable one at a rear corner of the house, overlooking almost the entire gardens and grounds, which might have comprised as much as half an acre, and extended far back to another street.

Instead of retiring, the detective extinguished the light as soon as the servant escorting him had gone, and then seated himself reflectively at the window best commanding the outlook.

The bank president's was a sedate, well-ordered household, accustomed to keeping good hours, it seemed.

Though but little past ten o'clock, the house soon became hushed and restful, as if all the regular inmates had sought their repose.

The streets adjoining were also retired ones, fronted for the most part by residences with more or less ample grounds attached, though not far from the business center of the town, so that but very little life seemed stirring.

The night was fine and cool and starry, with the mellow light from a newly-risen moon, almost at the full, softly flooding the world with its liquid, vitreous downpour.

Magnus sat at the window for some time, lost in thoughts that, in spite of himself, were only indirectly connected with his detective case in hand, and altogether of a personal nature.

If the truth must be told, they were almost wholly occupied with the image of the sweet, sorrow-bowed girl, Ada Maycourt, whom he had met at her mother's cottage that day for the first time.

Had it been a case of love at first sight? He almost confessed as much to himself, and the recognition, or semi-recognition, of the probability was not an unpleasing one. Though past thirty, and often, as a matter of course, smitten with admiration for feminine beauty, he had never till now been impressed, so far as he could remember, with what even approximated to the tenderness of a master and perhaps enduring passion.

He was, moreover, alone in the world, with scarcely a blood relative or family tie remaining to him, with a snug sum of savings prudently invested, for he was literally devoid of profligate or vicious tendencies, and his singularly sensitive nature—a source of quite as much emotional suffering as of business profit in the practice of his vocation—had often and often vaguely longed for the spiritual twinship or mated companionship which is the indispensable complement of every well-disposed human life in the pursuit of happiness, and which now possessed him more strongly than ever before as he thought of the sweet grace and modest resignation that had been that day revealed to him in this young girl's winning personality.

But as his eyes wandered listlessly out over the fair moonlight scene, with the vision of Ada Maycourt constantly in his thoughts, it was suddenly and rudely displaced by an incident,

which, or something like it, he had, nevertheless, vaguely expected or desired at first.

CHAPTER X.

THE TOUCH-TEST CONFIRMED, IN PART.

Two female faces, whose heads and figures were concealed by light, muffling shawls or mantels wrapped about their entire persons, had suddenly drifted out into the moonlight from under the house shadow directly beneath the window at which the detective was seated.

Two figures, the one tall, stately and graceful, which he at once recognized as Madame Renaud's; the slighter and more youthful, which might possibly belong to the banker's daughter, though, on second thought, this did not seem credible.

"I have it now!" exclaimed the detective to himself, with a quick breath of positive relief. "The girl Norah! Better, better—far better!"

The taller of the figures sped onward without pause, till partly lost in the shadow of some fruit and ornamental trees, while the other came to a stop near a grape-arbor midway between these and the kitchens, as if placing herself on watch under previously received instructions.

But the detective had already perceived a door, or gate, far back in the rear garden wall, toward which the housekeeper was obviously hastening.

Almost before his keen glance had noted these particulars, he was out of his room with the swiftness of thought, the noiselessness of a phantom.

He had already remarked the "lay" of the passages and staircases in their relation to the chamber to which he had been assigned.

Though not a light had been left burning and the route was pitch-dark where not relieved by a strong moonbeam at an opening here or there, he made his way to the front door, whose method of fastenings had likewise been noted, with the same flitting rapidity and by a species of unerring instinct.

Then to let himself out, dart through the garden walk and gain the street, was the work of but another breathless moment.

The house-grounds were a corner lot, running back, as has been intimated, to a rear street, probably to a depth of two hundred yards.

Fortunately, the streets were absolutely deserted.

Magnus, little as might have been guessed from his dreamy, rather spirituelle appearance, was in reality a thorough-paced 'sprinter' on occasion, besides being an all-round athlete from away back.

In another instant, and without an audible footfall, he rounded the corner, and was flitting along the side street in the shadow of the garden wall with the rapidity of the wind.

So swift and yet so light-footed was his flight, that he might have been treading on eggs, or skimming through the shadows on the wings of a bat.

He reached the corner, still hugging the shadow of the wall, just as the rear gate opened, and the tall, graceful figure of Madame Renaud stepped into view.

This rear street was hardly more than a lane, very narrow, with stable-fronts and other garden-walls directly opposite.

But the housekeeper had stepped out into the moonlighted side of this lane.

Hardly had she done so when there was a cautious signal, and she at once joined a dimly-outlined, powerful masculine figure, drawn back in the shadowy door-space of one of the stables opposite, but which the lynx-eyed detective, nevertheless, made out as that of Mr. Catesby Bartlow, the cashier, in strict accordance with his fullest expectations.

In sympathy with his extreme sensitiveness of organization, Magnus's faculty of hearing was also exceptionally keen.

At all events, by straining it to the utmost at this juncture, he could more or less distinctly overhear the initial words that passed between the conspirators, as they were quickly proved to be.

"Have you got them?" demanded the man's voice, anxiously.

"Yes; here!" she passed something to him. "We may thank our stars, too. It was the intention of our prime chump to exhibit them to the detective this very evening; but fortunately, a little timely eavesdropping in the garden gave me the cue, and I was beforehand with the pair."

"The Fates be praised!" muttered the man. "The accursed detective would have penetrated in an instant what has been all-sufficient to gull Grantby and his primitive fellow lunkheads thus far to a charm. What does this man, Magnus, suspect, as yet?"

"Hard to answer that, I fancy. The man, compared with ordinary detectives, is as a jewel-hilted Damascus blade to a boar-spear. His softest look strikes me with unaccountable fear." Then she said something in French, which the detective failed to follow, adding: "Could anything be more unfortunate? Everything was progressing swimmingly till this velvety-voiced marplot put in his accursed appearance."

"He must be disposed of somehow, and be-

fore it is too late," replied Bartlow, with something brooding and deadly in his low, vibrant voice. "It is not alone my possession of the banker's haughty young heiress, but my very safety no less, that demands it—a case of life and death!"

"What shall you do?"

"I am thinking and planning. Come in here, else we might be observed by some prowler."

He drew her into the passage at which they were standing, partly closing the door of it behind them.

As there was nothing more to be overheard, the detective chanced the risk of being discovered, and scudded lightly along the side of the rear wall, across the clear, moonlight space, toward the gate at which the housekeeper had emerged.

He slipped into the garden, satisfied that he had not been observed.

Then, as swiftly and lightly, he threaded the paths, stealthily approaching the grape-arbor, at which the girl, Norah, was keeping watch.

She did not suspect his presence until his hand suddenly closed upon her wrist—as of a grasp of steel, incased in a silken glove; and even then terror for the moment held her dumb.

"Spy! traitress!" there was an unsuspected deadliness in his low voice; "it is thus, then, that you repay your indulgent employer's forgiveness? You do not cry out, it seems?" with a contemptuous sneer.

"I—I cannot—dare not!" the young woman managed to gasp, rather than speak, in answer. "Your look seems to freeze both the tongue and the brain of me, sir."

"Give me your hand!" She obeyed mechanically, repressing an exclamation of anguish as his clasp closed upon it. "Still freezing, eh?"

"No, no; burning, burning! Oh, but your hand is red-hot, sir!"

"Come!" he drew her under the arbor, to guard against a possible surprise; the moonlight filtered fantastically through the vine-leaves, the grapes hanging in profuse ripe and half-ripe clusters over their heads and on either hand—a bacchante suggestion, dashed with a Mephistophelean diabolism. "Now you must make a compact with me—no fear but that you will keep it—or you are lost."

Perhaps the sensation of his clasp burning her hand to the bone, while his glance was still as ice in her brain, was real, perhaps imaginary. But, apart from this, the girl was little better than beside herself with terror.

"Och, sir," she faltered, "if you be, indade, the devil, I'll promise what ye will, if ye only spare the soul of me!"

"I want not your promise, but your obedience, which I will to have." He glanced out of the arbor; Madame Renaud was already visible, retracing her steps. "She comes, she returns. Mark you, girl, henceforth you act for me, belong to me, are my creature, till I will it otherwise. Do you fully recognize this?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Out, then, to meet that scheming woman, and to dissemble as I will you to do! Tomorrow, at my whispered command out of silence and emptiness, you will report to me, betraying her every confidence. Go!"

He forthwith thrust her out into the open moonlight.

Though somewhat automaton-like, the girl was suddenly composed, apparently all but herself again, as she calmly resumed her position, awaiting the housekeeper's approach.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONSPIRATORS AT BAY.

"ANYTHING?" queried Madame Renaud, as soon as she came up to where the girl awaited her.

The latter shook her head.

"Not anything suspicious whatever?"

"Nothing at all, ma'm."

The housekeeper scrutinized her critically.

"What has happened to you?"

"Me, ma'm? Why, nothing!"

"You are quite sure?" sharply.

"Sure, and I am, ma'm!"

"You look odd—not exactly changed, but as if you might have been shocked—startled."

"Oh, ma'm!"

"You are sure that you have seen nothing? That there is nothing wrong with you?"

"Not a bit of it, ma'm! I was after getting lonesome, besides finding the air a thrifle chill. That is all."

Madame Renaud took her off to the house with her, apparently satisfied.

So was the detective. At all events, he lost no time in finding his way back to his room as soon as he could do so with security.

"I rather think I can manage that brace of worthies," he said to himself, while striking a light and preparing for his night's rest. "Humph! very comfortable, very pleasant!"

These last words referred to his accommodations, which he now for the first time took occasion to examine interestedly.

They were certainly suggestive of agreeableness and home-comfort. The room was spacious and well aired, the carpet prettily colored and of rich tapestry wool, the furniture consisting almost wholly of bedstead, lavatory and old-

fashioned, restful-looking easy-chairs, substantially upholstered, while the bed itself especially excited his surprise and admiration. Not only was it one of the veriest old-time four-posters, richly carved, specimens of which are now-a-days sought and paid highly for by collectors, but it was even provided with the proverbial old-style chintz bed-curtains and hangings of our grandfathers, who seemed so honest in their belief that the circulation of fresh air about their sleeping forms could be little less than insidiously fatal, or at least vastly deleterious.

Magnus suddenly paused when half-undressed, and produced from his valise a new-looking book, whose index and pages he earnestly consulted.

"No, no, no!" he muttered, while thus engaged; "this villain Bartlow, of the hundred aliases, is doubtless one of the few that Inspector Byrnes has missed recording in this last superb book of his on the world's professional rogues. Perhaps it is because— Hal! but here it is." His face lighted up. "Why apologies for the great inspector.—The very man, by the description, and even with Bartwell, instead of Bartlow—a near enough approximation—as one of his later aliases. Humph! 'Cosmo Armsdale, about forty, of magnificent personal presence, a blonde, but with a real genius for disguises and character-changes, English and cosmopolitan adventurer, bank-thief, forger, etc., etc.; has a wife, also a magnificent English blonde, and almost his equal as a criminal expert, etc., etc." He closed the book with a highly satisfied air and returned it to the valise.

"Well, well," thought the detective, "I wonder what my host, our worthy bank president, would say to that."

He turned out the light, got into bed, and was soon fast asleep.

But Magnus had made the single-minded mistake, so common with the very best detectives—or, at least, with those possessing a positive genius for their calling—of keeping his game solely in view, while taking little or no care of his own personal safety.

He was suddenly and rudely awakened out of a troubled dream at the first faint dawn of day, and with a scorching, suffocated feeling, to find the curtains at one side of his bed in a blaze.

At the same instant he was aware of an all-but overpowering odor of chloroform.

Then he was yet more effectually startled by a drenching mass of cold water being dashed over and around him, which caused him to shout out.

As he sprung from the bed, the flames having been thus heroically extinguished, the girl, Norah, fully dressed, and with the empty water-jug still in her hand from which she had cast the saving torrent in such timely season, ran toward the open door, keeping her eyes modestly averted. "Don't give me away to the housekeeper, sir!" she faltered, in a guarded, fear-stricken voice. "I was on my way down-stairs to me wur-rk, when she slipped out of this room. Then I saw the flicker under the doore, an' was jist here in time to save you. But she would kill me if she guessed it. And indade, indade, indade, sir, it's a modest gur-rl that I am, who wouldn't dr'ame of such a thing as entering a gentleman's room, like this, only for—" Here she dropped the pitcher, and incontinently fled.

"Hump! Who would have guessed the serpent would lash out quite so soon, and in such handsome guise? Fool that I was, though, not to remember that the Borgia herself was lovely, and the Brinvilliers a beauty, with a face like a Madonna! My own fault, my own fault!"

And, thus grumbling to himself, Magnus, while leisurely dressing himself by the growing dawn-light—the flames having been wholly extinguished—calmly took in the situation.

He was still a little giddy, too, though, fortunately, but little of the anaesthetic had been inhaled.

The pillow at one end, however, was fairly drenched with chloroform, the fumes of which still lingered appreciably, while an empty four-ounce vial was lying on the floor.

Magnus was fairly puzzled.

What had deterred the housekeeper from completing the chloroforming process before setting fire to the bed, when she had had him completely at her mercy?

He at length came to the conclusion that she had most likely spilled the entire contents of the vial on the pillow through over-haste or nervous excitement—though she was scarcely the sort of woman one would suspect of such weakness—and had then frantically fired the hangings, before taking to flight, on the chance of his being smothered or being otherwise rendered powerless, to his destruction.

He lingered in the room until it was broad light, and then sauntered out for a morning stroll.

The domestics of the establishment were by this time generally astir, and in the lower hall passage he came upon Madame Renaud herself, face to face.

Although, since there had been no alarm, she must have surmised long ere this that he had somehow escaped her murderous intentions, she started visibly, turning very pale.

It was but for an instant, however, after which she was thoroughly herself again.

"Good-morning, monsieur," she said, smilingly, and with her French accent, which was none the less pretty and coquettish, even if affected. "I trust that monsieur has rested well."

"On the contrary, ma'm," Magnus replied, with the most natural concern, "some villainous burglar must have entered my room."

"Burglars, monsieur?"

"Yes, yes; and they even made the attempt to burn me up in my bed. Doubtless, crept in by the open window. However, they could have found nothing of my poor belongings worth appropriating, and were most probably frightened off before venturing to go through the house. Both odd and unfortunate, eh, ma'm? Robbing a police detective, the ideal! However, Mr. Grantby mustn't be allowed to feel mortified over it. Such accidents may occur in the very best of families at times. Morning, ma'm!"

And he went on his way, leaving her looking after him in no little mystification as to the genuineness of his unsuspicious indifference in the matter.

"The deep one!" she muttered to herself; "he isn't likely not to suspect the truth. And yet how could he have escaped unscathed? However, I must be surer next time, and soon—soon. But how poetically handsome the rascal is!" her eyes, which were still following his leisurely retreating figure from the front door, glinted significantly. "Ah! if I were not fully fixed upon hooking the old banker, and stepmothering the supercilious Mademoiselle Grace until—"

"What a lovely morning, madame!" said a musical, but rather cold voice in French behind her. "No wonder you are taking a breath of it here before the sun is up."

It was Miss Grantby herself, prettily attired for her accustomed early-morning 'constitutional,' whose step behind had not been noticed.

Though taken somewhat by surprise, the adventuress managed to answer with her accustomed gayety.

"In love with a dead man!" she sneeringly muttered, with a not too amiable glance after the graceful, stylish figure going down the broad, graveled walk. "However, perhaps it is all the better for my *confrere*, though we must hurry, hurry, hurry!" And she went back into the house with more nervous haste than her accustomed stateliness of movement.

To follow the detective in his stroll, he made the detour of the house-grounds wall, thus retracing his secret route of the preceding evening, and, after a little patient search, located the cashier's apartments over the shoe-store in an adjoining street, according to the information received from the bank president.

Then, a few minutes later, he found himself in the vicinity of the Maycourt cottage.

His pulse quickened, for, as he approached, Miss Maycourt herself appeared at the gate, with the kindly neighbors who had sat up with the remains, and to whom she was doubtless making her sorrowful acknowledgments on their taking their departure.

The sweet, still profoundly saddened blonde face was more composed and resigned now, doubtless after a night of at least partial forgetfulness under the reposeful wand of slumber, which can both mesmerize and heal, both recuperate and restore, howsoever slowly and imperceptibly. She stood there momentarily alone after the men had gone, silently inhaling the warm summer air and the scents of the laburnums partly overarched the gate, with a grateful air; and Magnus was sure he had never seen so lovely and interesting an image, nor one whose tender beauty seemed to be positively intensified by its pathetic mournfulness of aspect.

It was of a naturally mirthful and yet spirituelle beauty, over which bereavement had cast a sorrowful mist or glamour of sobering enchantment, but out of whose twilight it must sooner or later sparkle and smile again, like a fair statue in the sun.

Then his blood quickened yet more tumultuously, for, on perceiving and recognizing him at the sound of his now lingering step, there was a great welcome in her face, perhaps even a delicate change of color in the pale cheeks, and she even held out her hand.

CHAPTER XII. WAITING.

SHE gave him greeting in her low, soft voice, and then seemed at a loss what to say, while the young man felt a certain awkwardness on his part.

"You are looking improved, miss," he said, after merely mentioning that he was out for an aimless stroll. "Let me hope that your good mother has also obtained something of a night's rest."

"You infer, then," she answered, with a faint smile, "that such at least has been my own good fortune, sir?"

"Yes; you look it."

"It is true," gravely; "though mamma, in her own case, had to have recourse to an opiate that Dr. Beecham had left for her. Besides, in addition to those gentlemen who have just gone, our neighbors were very kind in keeping

us company till bedtime—our neighbors of our own sex, I mean."

"And here, doubtless, comes a yet more welcome one," said Magnus, indicating Miss Grantby, who was approaching in the distance. "By the way," his voice and manner suddenly becoming sharp, prompt and determined, "if the young lady obtains the impression that I have probably been watching the house in secret, as a preliminary, it will be well. Do you understand me?" She nodded. "Good! In the mean time, don't forget that I am to keep watch to-night alone, and I may also call during the day to keep up appearances as to this search business. I see you understand me. Good-morning, Miss Maycourt!"

He lifted his hat with earnest respectfulness, and in turning away was also in time to repeat the courtesy for Grace, as the latter was sympathetically quickening her pace to greet her friend.

Before turning the adjacent street-corner, the detective threw back a last look toward the gate, where both young women were still together, affording a striking and pleasing contrast by their diverse types of beauty in the fresh new sunshine, now just slanting over the tree and house-tops from the East.

"Blonde and brunette!" reflected the detective, scarcely slackening his pace, though with his head still turned for a last greedy glimpse of the charming picture; "and, I suppose, from a disinterested point of view, equally attractive one with another. Still, there is a certain haughtiness, not to say 'uppishness,' in the banker's handsome heiress, which, thank Heaven! one would look for in vain in the sweet gentleness, the modest purity—"

He had just turned the corner, and ran with something of a colliding shock directly into a man who—likewise in something of an absent-minded reverie, no doubt—was advancing rapidly from the opposite direction.

Then they recognized each other on the instant, the new-comer being none other than Mr. Bartlow, the cashier, himself.

"Hallo!" cried Magnus, good-naturedly; "it is you, sir? I beg pardon, if that is in order."

The magnificent cashier was no less polite, though a fleeting preliminary scowl of intense hatred, if not of actual ferocity, had not escaped the detective's masked penetration.

And was there not, also, a certain wonder in Bartlow's air, as if he might be discomfited a little at meeting him at all?

"Don't mention it," he replied, laughing. "Fully as much my fault as yours, no doubt. So you are likewise given to early strolls, it seems?"

"Yes, yes; and, curious enough, I had forgotten your being given to them, too. However, business is business, you know, and one might as well familiarize oneself with the scene of his expected operations, first as last." With a backward motion of the head in the direction of the Maycourt house; and then, with a bow, the detective kept on his way, apparently as pre-occupied as before.

"I wonder if he is really in earnest in this search business," meditated the cashier, also resuming his way, though with a slower step. "And how could C'lestie have failed in following up her promise to make way with him forthwith? She wouldn't be apt to lose nerve or stamina at the trying moment. Confusion seize the marplot hound!" with a savagely muttered oath; "if he should but suspect the truth! However, that is sheerly impossible, unless the dead should speak out from his shroud, which is not to be dreamed of; though, somehow, I shall feel safer when the bookkeeper's corpse is underground, if, indeed, it will pay the chances to wait even that long."

Then, for the first time perceiving the young ladies at the gate, he quickened his pace, approaching them with his habitual smile.

Ada Maycourt, who always experienced an unaccountable repulsion for the man, notwithstanding his exceptionally handsome presence and fascination of address, and altogether apart from his association with her recent bereavement, abruptly made her escape into the house before he could come up.

Miss Grantby remained to meet him, saying with a complaisance to which he was little accustomed, and which encouraged him accordingly:

"I was just about returning home for breakfast, Mr. Bartlow. You can accompany me back to the house, if you like."

Mr. Bartlow was only too happy for the privilege, and as they moved along slowly together, was forthwith complimentary and agreeable to the top of his bent.

But he was secretly dissatisfied for all that, being speedily aware through his intuitions, which were of a high order, that something underlay the young lady's unusual good-nature with his advances, as though she might be playing a part.

However, he let no more appear than the utmost unsuspicion and contentment on his own part, and did not fail to take advantage of such amiableness as she vouchsafed, whether genuine or assumed.

Arriving at her own gate, he thankfully de-

clined an invitation to enter on the plea of being engaged to breakfast with a friend, and then said, with becoming seriousness:

"Miss Grantby, I—I have much to say to you on a subject that is of the most important, I may say of the most vital interest to me."

His manner was both impressive and significantly naive, with just about the right degree of deferential timidity, and he paused to give her a chance to interpose something if so disposed, but Grace only looked at him calmly, and said nothing.

"May I ask—will you consider it presumptuous," he continued, even with tender earnestness, "in me to request an interview—say some time to-day, if convenient—at which I can express myself more fully than at present, Miss Grantby?"

"There can be no impropriety in the interview you propose, Mr. Bartlow," the young lady answered, with cold politeness. "You can call at any time this afternoon."

"Shall I say at half-past three, which will be directly after banking hours?" he feverishly asked, almost clasping his hands in his eagerness."

"Just as you please, Mr. Bartlow."

As she turned up the walk, however, she did not see what was perceived by the Touch-Detective, who was observing the situation from a lounging position on the front piazza of the residence, where he was awaiting the announcement for breakfast, partly concealed by clambering trellis vines. And that was Madame Renaud exchanging a swift, significant sign with the cashier, as the latter was turning away from the gate, after lifting his hat to the heiress, with his most elaborate bow.

Then Mr. Grantby himself appeared on the piazza, as the housekeeper announced that breakfast was waiting, looking both mortified and bewildered, for the burglarious and incendiary attempt in his guest's room had only just come to his knowledge.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH THE DAY.

At the breakfast table, Magnus still kept up the false impression, and tried to get rid of the subject by making light of it.

"My dear sir," he said to the banker, in his composed, easy way, "there is real-nothing to get excited over. A sneak-thieving attempt! What does it amount to?"

"Sneak-thieving, yes!" cried Mr. Grantby. "But this sort of mysterious, murderous attack, together with the attempt to chloroform and then burn you up in your bed! Outrageous! If you weren't yourself a detective, I'd send to New York for another, and not rest another hour till the scoundrel was safe behind iron bars."

"An outrage, indeed!" musically echoed Grace, who had been greatly shocked by the news. "Indeed, papa, it wouldn't be so bad to summon a whole corps of detectives, as it is, Mr. Magnus being otherwise engaged."

Magnus burst into an amused laugh.

"Heavens!" joined in Madame Renaud, from behind the coffee-urn, and in her pretty bogus French accent; "I should say so. And how can monsieur laugh so carelessly over such a terribly narrow escape?" She gave a little shiver.

"Look here now, my good friends," said the detective, still smilingly, "do not, I entreat, disturb yourselves any more over this little matter."

"But it isn't a little matter," persisted the banker. "It is a decidedly big matter."

"Ah, well," quietly, "at least allow me to make it my private matter, my dear sir. Do that, and I promise to at least 'spot' the feloniously inclined intruder—well, inside of three days, at the furthest."

"What, you promise that?"

"Certainly."

"Then, apart from my mortification as your host, I shall rest satisfied."

"It is understood, then. And, moreover, it may also turn out"—this was especially for the further soothing of the housekeeper's suspicions—"that what you deem was an attempt to burn me up was altogether an accident, and quite as much of a surprise to the intending burglar as to myself."

This seemed to settle the matter for the time being, and every one went on with the repast in a more cheerful frame of mind.

"By the way, Mr. Magnus," the banker presently observed, with a satisfied air, "Grace informs me that you were having an eye to that chief business of ours at a very early hour this morning."

Miss Grantby at the same time gave the detective a look which he understood.

"Ah! at the Maycourt cottage, you mean?"

"Of course."

"Humph! Well, it isn't a bad thing to be looking over one's selected ground betimes, you know."

"Indeed, yes! Have you begun the actual search, then?"

"Only superficially. But look here," appar-

ently with a reluctant frankness, "I must admit that I now agree with you as to a discovery awaiting us in that quarter."

"Aha!" Mr. Grantby's eyes glistened. "I felt you would share my impression as to those missing bonds. Good!"

"Just leave me to my own devices," continued Magnus, cheerfully, if evasively. "By this time to-morrow, if not considerably earlier, the discovery shall be forthcoming."

Pleased as he was, Mr. Grantby now for the first time thought of his daughter's feelings, which this turn of the discussion might have wounded most poignantly. But a sympathetic, self-reproachful glance across the table at her furnished him with yet another agreeable surprise.

Grace was composedly eating her breakfast with her accustomed appetite. Indeed, so far as the display of any painful emotion was concerned, she might never have had more than the most trivial acquaintance with the unfortunate brother of Ada Maycourt.

"How splendidly she is getting over it!" exclaimed the happy and purblind father to himself. "Gad! in spite of the shock she manifested over the news at first, her former liking for wretched young Maycourt couldn't have been more than skin-deep, after all. Aha! Bartlow has a chance for her still."

He was almost gleeful when he rose from the table and went off to the bank, after shaking hands with both his guest and daughter, besides beamingly nodding to Madame Renaud, quite exuberantly.

As for Magnus himself, the calmness with which Miss Grantby had listened to the last discussion had likewise struck him as singular, if not heartless.

But she managed to intercept him in the front hall when he was on his way out, saying:

"Mr. Magnus, my dear friend, Ada Maycourt, has been telling me of your very gentlemanly considerateness at the cottage yesterday afternoon."

She was looking at him with peculiar intensity. Her dark eyes were like stars, and there was such a mantling of color in her beautiful olive cheeks that he was no longer in doubt as to the genuineness of the florid cashier's passion.

"May I have a few words in private with you, Mr. Magnus, a short time hence?" she inquired, very graciously.

"Certainly, miss," he replied. "But why not now and here, allow me to ask?"

"I—I do not feel exactly equal to it at this moment. Besides—they were at the foot of the broad staircase, with no one else in view, but she threw a quick glance around her—"we might be observed."

He smiled.

"Ah! you have, then, already learned to distrust—"

"The housekeeper, yes," in a low voice.

"I am glad of that. At your pleasure, then, Miss Grantby."

He made his bow, and passed out, while the young lady went on up the stairs.

It was the detective's intention to pass on up the street, as if for a long stroll, and then, if possible, to gain the garden by that little rear gate without being perceived; for it would not be bank hours for some little time, and he felt confident that the visual signal exchanged by the conspirators from gate to piazza would be followed by a secret meeting for conference and explanations at their earliest convenience.

He therefore moved briskly up the street, so as to make the detour of the entire block, or square, and at the first turn chanced upon the girl Norah, on her return from some errand, which he deemed to be fortunate.

"I have not forgotten your service of this morning," he said, after causing her to stop. "It made me your friend and well-wisher. Continue to serve me, and you will not regret it."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" replied the girl, with much earnestness. "Yes, sir, I will be pleased to follow your orders. Indeed, I misdoubt if I could help myself, if I wanted to."

"Why?"

"Indade, an' I can hardly say, sir; but there's a quare look in your eyes, sir, as if they were just a touchin' me all over, an' would kill me entirely if I played you false."

"Good, then; but I mean you nothing but kindness."

"I belayave you, sir."

"You are an excellent pickpocket, as a matter of course?"

"Sir!" flaring up.

"Stuff! I know your past, girl. Are you an expert, or not?"

"I was considered a rare one, sir," Norah frankly admitted, "before I reformed."

"That is better," more kindly.

"What would your Honor have me do?"

"The housekeeper will doubtless receive a communication from Mr. Bartlow within an hour or less. You must obtain its purport for me."

"I'll do my best, sir."

He dismissed her, and resumed his stroll.

Once more cautiously approaching the neighborhood of the cashier's lodgings, he was just in time to avoid being observed as Bartlow made

his appearance, coming out of the street door with a stern and preoccupied air.

"Is he going direct to the bank or not?" muttered the detective, consulting his watch.

And, keeping well out of sight, he accordingly 'shadowed' his man, as the latter moved briskly away.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SCRAP OF PAPER.

MAGNUS was accordingly not a little gratified to see the cashier presently turn into the narrow street at the rear of Mr. Grantby's grounds.

Mr. Bartlow paused for some moments in the vicinity of the gate, throwing keen but seemingly careless looks around him, as if to make sure that he was not being tracked or observed.

But, an adept at 'shadowing,' the detective had already slipped into hiding in one of the stable passages on the opposite side, and was observing his every movement.

At length the cashier suddenly disappeared through the door in the wall, closing it behind him.

Magnus smiled complacently.

Bartlow reappeared, however, almost instantly, and walked away in the direction of the bank, after glancing at his watch, and another rapid survey of his surroundings.

"So!" thought the detective; and, flitting across the street, he slipped into the garden in his turn.

There could not have been time for Bartlow to have had word with the housekeeper, he thought.

No sooner had he effected his concealment in a convenient nook just inside the gate before he perceived Madame Renaud approaching, with an alert and expectant air.

"Ah!" murmured the detective.

The woman, after a cautious look around her, sauntered up to a gnarled old apple tree, and drew from somewhere in its crotch a folded slip of paper, which, after yet another preliminary survey, she opened and seemed to peruse with some difficulty.

"Such haste!" she muttered thoughtfully, and loud enough for the detective to overhear, for he was crouching close at hand. "However, perhaps it is better so; though it seems to me his apprehensions are premature."

She thrust the paper in her bosom, and retraced her steps.

Magnus waited and reflected.

He must know the purport of that scrap of writing—Bartlow's message to his fair confederate—without fail and without delay.

But should he risk communicating with Norah to that end there in the rear grounds, or make his way back to the house for that purpose by the front gate, the better to avoid the housekeeper's suspicions, should she chance to observe his return?

No; to return directly to the house would perhaps bring about the requested interview with Miss Grantby at once, which he was not yet quite prepared for; and besides, no especial suspicion could attach to his having re-entered the handsome grounds for a stroll while finishing his cigar.

He accordingly proceeded to the grape arbor at which he had encountered the housemaid on the preceding night, and put forth his will to the utmost to bring her to him.

This was a species of mesmeric power which Magnus possessed in a certain degree in connection with his phenomenal sensitiveness to impressions through his sense of touch; though it was only upon particular subjects or temperaments that he could exert it successfully.

Was the girl Norah one of these? He thought and hoped so, but could only await the result of the test.

Concealed by the lowering vine-leaves, but with the path leading from the kitchen garden at the back of the house more or less under his observation, he concentrated his mind upon the girl, stretched forth his hand, and willed her to him with all his might.

It was long before there was a response, but at last, much to his satisfaction and relief, the young woman appeared at the head of the path.

She looked about her hesitatingly at first, but then advanced speedily toward him, her comely face lighting up, partly with surprise, partly with pleasure, as she met his soft smile.

"Oh, sir," said the girl, "and you are really here, then?"

"Yes, Norah, and awaiting you," replied the detective. "But, how did you know?"

"I—I just somehow couldn't help myself, sir," was the reply.

"Have you anything for me?"

She handed him a folded slip, saying: "I had sharp work to crib it, sir, for she had tucked it away in her bosom. But luckily her hair came down while we were dustin' the drawing-rooms together, an' it was while I was kindly rayarrin' of it, sir, that—"

"You have done capitally, Norah. That will do now. When you return you might mention that you saw me in the grounds with my cigar, as if I might have re-entered them by the front gate."

"Good luck to your Honor!"

After the girl had gone, Magnus lost no time in examining the paper.

It contained writing in cipher, but which the detective, being an adept in such matters, soon managed to resolve into the following communication, without either address or signature:

"Am to have an interview with G. G., this afternoon. Will do the lover act to the top of my bent, depend on it, but am dubious as to result. In case of non-success, will have to make a clean sweep of cash-vaults and effect my evanishment to-night, or say at two A.M., which will give me time to cut for the Canadian border, as I have pre-arranged. At all events, we mustn't risk speaking together again, you and I. Will signal you as to result at dinner table this evening. If I drop my napkin, consider that the heiress is obdurate, and that the scoop and flight as just hinted are fixed upon. There is no other course; for, with both G. G., and the detective suspecting me, to delay longer would be madness. Besides, there is some mystery about that corpse at the Maycourts that both puzzles and daunts me. I can't help dreading and foreboding—I don't know what. In the mean time, you have your own game with regard to the old one. It is in your hands, if you play it with discretion and power; though don't make the mistake of underrating the Maycourt widow as a possible rival. I shan't quite break the bank, I hope; so that there will be good pickings for you to rake in with old G. Good luck to both of us, until we can be together once more in safety, and with our future secure!"

The detective folded up the paper and carefully put it away in his pocketbook, with a smile.

"When will not the shrewdest scoundrelism overreach or give itself away sooner or later?" he cogitated. "But one would really have expected something cleverer of the accomplished Cosmo Armsdale, *alias* Bartlow, Bartwell, *et cetera, et cetera*. The work goes bravely on."

Santering into the front grounds, he made out as if having recently entered from the main street, when he perceived Madame Renaud moving restlessly over the graveled approaches to the house, her downcast eyes roving searchingly here and there.

"Fine morning, ma'm!" was the detective's polite greeting, as he tossed away his cigar-stump. "Lost anything, may I inquire?"

The woman eyed him with a swift suspicion, but with an evident effort to hide a certain agitation of manner.

"Yes, monsieur, a bit of household memoranda," she replied. "But," with assumed indifference, "it was of no great consequence."

"A memorandum? Might this be it, that I picked up by the gate yonder a few minutes ago?"

This was the truth, and he handed her a small list of groceries, which Norah had perhaps dropped on her first errand of the morning.

Madame Renaud eagerly snatched at the paper, but tore it up and scattered the fragments, with a look it seemed of mingled disappointment and relief.

"No, that is not it," she said. "But I probably dropped the paper somewhere within doors, and it was really of no consequence. Yes, as monsieur says, the morning is lovely." And she continued her searching walk back in the direction of the kitchens."

When she had passed out of sight around the house, Miss Grantby, wearing her garden hat, appeared on the front piazza, looking somewhat expectant.

The detective raised his hat, with a smile, and she forthwith joined him, when she indicated a comparatively secluded path leading off among the shrubberies to the right, which they accordingly pursued together.

There was a flutter of nervousness in the young lady's manner, which Magnus noted, and then said:

"I am wholly at your service, Miss Grantby. I presume you wish to speak with me confidentially?"

"Yes, if you have no objections," she replied, at once placed more at her ease by his kindly respectfulness, which seemed both to invite and encourage her confidence. "That is, if we can avoid observation, or the possibility of being spied upon."

"Exactly. Then let me suggest a more open spot, with less chance of eavesdropping, than just here. That is a pretty little summer-house on the bare knoll yonder."

"Isn't it rather exposed?"

"And therefore the securer from espionage. Just the place."

They accordingly proceeded to the spot indicated, and were no sooner seated than Magnus said, in his easy, engaging way:

"Let me help you out of your embarrassment a bit, miss. You wish, if I mistake not, to speak to me first about the sad affair at the Maycourts, and perhaps then to tell me that you have consented to give Mr. Bartlow an appointment for this afternoon."

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE SUMMER-HOUSE.

MISS GRANTBY looked up in unqualified surprise.

"How have you divined that, sir?" she asked.

"Ah, miss, but that is hardly of importance, provided that I have divined it correctly," was

the smiling reply. "Confess that such is the case."

"It is so, in part," and Grace also smiled, whereupon there suddenly seemed established quite a good understanding between them. "I will further confess, and frankly, Mr. Magnus, that there are several things I wish to talk with you about."

"Go right ahead, then, my dear young lady. Nothing like making a beginning."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Grace, impulsively, "you told both Mrs. Maycourt and Ada to hope."

"Y-e-s," slowly.

"What did you mean by it, sir?—to hope for what?" She clasped her hands.

"Well—er—I merely meant for 'em to hope, you know."

"But to hope for what?"

"Oh, merely in general, you know; not to give way to despondency and despair."

"But there is poor Randall dead in the house—all this ghastly disgrace and misery!"

"Y-e-s; to be sure."

"And that is their sole cause of misery and mine. What can be hoped for for him?"

"I can't particularize, ma'm."

"But you must, sir!" vehemently. "This mystification is cruel—worse than cruel!"

"No mystification about it—or there needn't be for any great length of time," said Magnus, a little doggedly. "If they don't choose to take hope thus vaguely and on general principles, they needn't to. That is all."

"Oh, Mr. Magnus!" This was all that Grace could say, but there was an agonized sort of appeal and entreaty in her words and manner.

"Yes, miss."

"I—I am quite as much, quite as painfully, interested in this tragic affair as either Mrs. Maycourt or Ada can be, sir."

"So I have surmised, miss."

"Mr. Magnus, I—I loved him! I loved Randall Maycourt and he loved me. In fact, we—we were secretly betrothed to one another, sir."

"You honor me highly with such a confidence, miss," replied the detective, gravely.

"Do I so? Now, then, won't you say what there is to hope, and how we may hope?"

"No, miss, not now, at least. I can't particularize just yet."

"But this is cruel, sir!"

"Indeed, I don't mean it to be, miss."

"When will you condescend to be more particular, then?"

"Very shortly hence." Magnus looked at his watch. "Say considerably less than before another day passes over our heads."

She was looking at him with a wild and fluttering eagerness, that yet, for all its painfulness, served to increase her dark beauty.

"What! and you bid me, also, to hope till then?"

"I do, most assuredly, and with all my heart!" cried the detective. "And now, Miss Grantby, pray proceed to something else. So you have accorded Mr. Bartlow, and doubtless at his urgent request, an appointment for this afternoon?"

"Yes, sir, I have." She approached the change of subject, as suggested, reluctantly, but with resolution.

"And you do me the honor to wish to consult me even on that point beforehand."

"Yes; I am very much troubled, Mr. Magnus."

"Suppose you speak out unreservedly, something as if I were your brother, you know. You can rely on my sincerity and disinterestedness."

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Magnus. Yes, I will do so. Perhaps, you have likewise surmised something as to this matter, sir?"

"Yes; and, moreover, your father has vouchsafed to speak to me of Mr. Bartlow's passion."

"Mr. Bartlow's passion, indeed?" contemptuously. "And then papa's infatuation for that man! Mr. Magnus, I really can't understand it."

"I can, in a measure, at least in Mr. Grantby's case. Mr. Bartlow is an exceptionally showy and impressive man. But for all that, I can also understand why he fails to impress you, save disagreeably, and to be glad for your own sake that it is so."

The young woman turned her bright eyes upon her companion with a pleased, trusting look.

"Thank you for saying that, sir!" she said, in her impressive way. "Mr. Magnus, I just hate that man!"

"Why?"

"Because I do, and can't help it," she laughed. "A good enough woman's reason, no? But I can see just how grandly handsome he is, and even fascinating for most. Yet there is something, in fact everything, about him that inspires me with mistrust and dread."

"This is well."

"Who and what is he in reality, Mr. Magnus?—an adventurer, or worse?"

"I would rather not say at once, miss," the detective answered, slowly. "Pray, wait for the final enlightenment that I have indirectly promised you."

"I shall do so. But you have doubtless formed your private opinion of the gentleman?"

"As a matter of course, and a decidedly unfavorable one."

"Well, I sha'n't have any pity for him—not a bit, though perhaps it is in the worst taste for me to say so," said Miss Grantby. "I know his desire is to formally propose to me this afternoon. Well, let him do so, if he is so dull as not to guess his answer, without receiving it."

"Allow me to command your resolve, miss," observed the detective, with his smile. "And I can also hazard a shrewd guess or two as to what may follow upon your refusal of this bleeding heart which the susceptible cashier is so ready to lay at your haughty feet, if you care to know it."

"What do you predict, Mr. Magnus?"

"First that the gentleman will accept your father's invitation to dinner, in spite of his rejection at your hands."

"What, you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"What else do you predict?"

"That in the course of his repast he will drop his napkin on the floor."

"Why will he do that?" wonderingly demanded the young lady.

"As a signal to Madame Renaud that he has played for his stake and lost, and that perhaps something else can be looked for as the alternative."

Miss Grantby looked at him in unqualified astonishment.

"What?" she exclaimed; "you engage all this to happen?"

"With a reasonable amount of certainty."

"Why, you must be a magician."

"No; only a detective expert."

"But how can you foretell this?"

Magnus laughed.

"Don't think me churlish: but that must remain my secret for the present."

"Very well. But, Mr. Magnus!" with renewed eagerness.

"Well, Miss Grantby."

"Is there really a secret understanding between Madame Renaud and Mr. Bartlow?"

"Have you never suspected it?"

"Only of late—or at least the possibility of such a thing has occurred to me. But, answer my question, if you will."

"Yes, then; though it should not be suspected that we are aware of it."

"Trust my discretion for that. I have always, from the very first," Miss Grantby drew a long breath, and set her pretty teeth hard, "somehow mistrusted that woman. And the idea of her making up to papa in the artful, insidious way that she does!"

"You are on the right track. But don't forget to be thoroughly on your guard against the woman. She has been secretly observing us from behind the lattices of the little side-piazza, by the way, ever since we first took our seats here together."

Grace threw a quick, resentful look in the direction of the house.

"I see no signs of that," she said.

"But I do."

"Like enough. I would be ready to believe, Mr. Magnus," with a laugh, "that you could almost see a thing before it happened." And here there was the ringing of a bell.

"I am hardly a prescientist," replied the detective, "Is that the summons for luncheon?"

"Yes; you will come?"

"Only as far as the piazza with you. We mustn't forget that I am supposed to have the Maycourt cottage under rigid watch."

She held out her hand confidently, and Magnus pressed it gently, so that the action might not be perceived by the jealous eyes watching them from the house.

"Good-by till later on, then, Mr. Magnus," murmured the young lady. "I am so glad that I have confided in you."

"Thank you, miss; but don't neglect to keep your head, as they say."

"Trust me for that."

As they were separating at the piazza steps, the housekeeper put in a smiling appearance, and expressed her regrets that Mr. Magnus could not remain for lunch.

CHAPTER XVI.

BETWEEN COTTAGE AND MANSION.

AFTER a brief snack at a restaurant, the detective, who had good reasons of his own for a period of self-communion in the interim, leisurely took his way to the Maycourt cottage.

Coming within sight of it, however, he quickened his pace, for a couple of men, probably an undertaker and his assistant, were just entering the place.

Mrs. Maycourt and Ada were in the hall passage, with a neighbor, as the detective made his appearance by the door, which had been left open.

The mutely piteous looks of the previous day had repossessed them, and they were listening with clasped hands to the professional movements that were audible from the chamber of death.

"Leave it all to me," said Magnus, in his low, kindly voice, respectfully taking the hand of each. "I take up my watch now, to be but briefly interrupted when I shall go to Mr.

Grantby's to dine. Try to think of something else, at least for a little while."

They submissively retired into an adjoining room, while the detective entered the apartment where the men were at their undertaking work, closing the door behind him.

It was well that the stricken mother and sister were not present.

The coffin had been brought, was already upon the trestles, in fact, and as the men were placing the body in the box they were having their little matter-of-fact talk, perhaps after the cold-blooded manner of their kind.

But after all, should the undertaker's man be blamed, any more than the ruder grave-digger, for the hardening of the sensibilities that comes so naturally of his constant familiarization with the inanimate forms that have wrung so many an agonized but fleeting sob and tear from the handful few?

"It's a pretty tight fit, isn't it?" said the assistant.

"I should say so," replied the undertaker; "but he'd have got a worse fit if he had lived, like enough—four strong walls for a good part of his days."

"Who'd have thought of it of Ran Maycourt?" continued the first. "The pink of propriety and honesty, one would have sworn to!"

"Well, you know," chimed in the other, who had doubtless envied the unfortunate youth his high reputation, "perhaps I wouldn't, for one. Of course, the widow and the pretty young miss are to be greatly pitied, and all that, but the young gentleman always struck me as somewhat ultra, a little too, too, you know, to last it out."

They had by this time disposed the shrouded form within the casket, and partly drawn over the cover, though without fastening it down.

"They'll be able to see the face through the winder in the lid," said the subordinate. "Why not screw it down now, and be done with it?"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" exclaimed the detective, angrily advancing, and now discovering his presence for the first time. "If your offices are finished for the present, as they seem to be, the faster you make yourselves scarce the better."

The assistant, who was a surly-looking fellow, seemed disposed to resent the interference, but his superior grasped his arm.

"It is the fly cop from New York," he whispered. "Come along!" And he led him out of the room.

"This is the way they managed to keep the circumstances of this miserable affair secret!" thought Magnus, bitterly. "The oafs! Doubtless the entire gossiping community is by this time familiar with the young man's unmerited disgrace, and I would be willing to bet my head that that specious hypocrite of a cashier is responsible for it!"

He removed the coffin cover entirely, and, seating himself, remained gazing long and earnestly on the strained, marble face, occasionally allowing the back of his hand to rest upon the brow, with a curious lingering touch.

"Not yet," he muttered; "no, not yet."

As in the former instance, he passed his hand under the shroud and over the heart, though now there was an unaffected eagerness in his manner, and he seemed to listen no less than to feel with his touch.

"No, not yet," he repeated, after a long pause. "And perhaps it is as well."

He waited, apparently absorbed in thought, until late in the afternoon, when there was a movement at the door, and he opened it to admit the widow and her daughter.

They were once more comparatively composed.

"It wants but a short time to Mr. Grantby's dinner hour, sir," said Mrs. Maycourt. "We thought perhaps you had forgotten."

"No, I had not forgotten. You will remain here alone, then, till my return, say within a couple of hours?"

"Oh, yes."

"But, there was a lady with you, doubtless a kind neighbor?"

"Yes, Madame Marchette, the milliner. She will bear us company again presently. Madame is very kind, considering that she is but recently a neighbor, and but a slight acquaintance. But Madame Renaud and others recommend her, and she certainly seems very ladylike and sympathetic—"

"She is a friend of Mr. Grantby's housekeeper, then?" interrupted the detective, with swift suspiciousness.

Both ladies looked at him in surprise, while nodding an assent.

"A spy, like enough!" exclaimed Magnus, yet more abruptly. "You have reason to fear the Renaud woman no less than the cashier. No time for explanation now. You are expecting this milliner to return, you say?"

"Yes," replied the widow, "to watch with us during your brief absence."

"Find some excuse to shorten her stay. Another of your neighbors would willingly watch with you in her place, doubtless?"

"Yes, yes."

"Quick, then; let this woman find me on the search business, for a blind. Which was your son's bedroom, ma'm?"

"The back room at the head of the stairs."

"Good!" He forthwith darted out of the apartment and up the stairs.

When the sympathetic Madame Marchette reappeared a few minutes later, there was an unceremonious rummaging going on in that particular room up there.

"What in the world is the matter?" cried the visitor, with a French accent that was as unaffected as Madame Renaud's was the reverse. "Who is making all that racket?"

Miss Maycourt took it upon herself to reply, with an air of mortification and annoyance that was sufficiently in accordance with her general worry and sadness.

"It is that detective, I suppose," she said, bitterly. "Well, let him search and rummage as he may!"

"Oh!" and the milliner elevated her eyes; "the missing property, eh? I had forgotten. And yet the monsieur seemed to me so amiable and considerate."

"He can be anything to order, perhaps," observed Mrs. Maycourt, also taking up the role. "Doubtless it's a part of his profession."

Here the detective appeared on the landing above, with his coat off, a small hammer in his hand, his hat and knees dusty, as if fresh from ransacking many an odd corner.

Excusing himself with a gruff politeness, he descended, putting on his coat while doing so, and, availing himself of a wisp-broom that was lying on the hat-rack ledge, began to dust himself off unceremoniously in the presence of the three women.

"Better luck later on, I hope," he muttered, grumbly. "However, I have between now and the funeral at my disposal, and can go ahead, room by room, cranny by cranny, at leisure. I hope you won't think hard of me, ma'm, nor you either, miss; but business is business, as you ought to know."

"It's scandalous, under the circumstances, and I should think you would be ashamed of yourself!" the Frenchwoman took it upon herself to declare, indignantly. She was a thin, smartly-dressed little woman, with snapping black eyes, and not without some *passer* pretensions to good looks. "You might at least have waited until—but one looks in vain for any respect for the proprieties in this country."

"Indeed, ma'm," sneered the detective. "And yet you doubtless condescend to make a living of it."

"It's a scandal, an outrage! And I don't believe you have discovered a single thing to warrant your officiousness."

"Don't you wish you knew whether I had or not?" And with this parting sneer, Magnus abruptly took himself off.

As he had predicted to Miss Grantby, the cashier was present as a guest at the bank president's dinner-table, appearing very composed and at his very best, and the dessert was not more than well under way when the gentleman managed to exchange a covert glance with the housekeeper, and to drop his napkin upon the floor.

Then it was the turn of the detective and Miss Grantby to likewise exchange a glance, that was no less secret than circumspect.

"I have begun my search in earnest," Magnus said to the banker a little later on, when taking his departure for the evening. "You can safely expect something both surprising and satisfactory from me between now and morning."

Mr. Grantby seemed pleased, and rubbed his hands softly.

"Aha!" he said; "you are discovering that our suspicions were not altogether misplaced, after all, eh?"

"Well, there's something ahead for us, anyway."

"Thank Heaven for that! Then will come the funeral, and after that I trust this whole piece of misery and unhappiness will be laid away."

It was early dusk when Maguus returned to the cottage, to find that Madame Marchette had been got rid of, and where he forthwith took up his solitary watch over the dead.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MEMORABLE NIGHT-WATCH.

THE midnight hour was approaching, and Magnus was sitting by the coffined form.

He was at a small table, an open book before him, on which the full glow of a shaded student's lamp was directed, but his eyes only occasionally sought the printed page, being for the most part turned with many an eager and anxious glance toward the white, upturned face looking up so ghastly yet peacefully from the bier to the ceiling.

Not a sound, save the ticking of a clock in an adjoining room, disturbed the reposeful hush of the unhappy house, both mother and daughter having retired at an early hour, in obedience to the watcher's kindly insistence, either to wear out the long hours in distracting thought, or to briefly forget their sorrow in slumber.

For the dozenth time, perhaps, since taking up his vigil, the detective arose, unshaded the lamp, and, bending over the upturned face, thus brightly revealed in all its strained, staring ghastliness, gazed earnestly and critically upon the fixed lineaments.

By way of explanation, which the reader may already have guessed, let it be said here that Magnus had been impressed from the first, and was still impressed, with the belief that death here was not real, but only apparent—a case of suspended animation, doubtless in a cataleptic form, and brought about by an overmastering emotional or nervous shock, operating upon an organization naturally not strong, or perhaps unconsciously susceptible to such prostrations on occasion.

"Still no change?" muttered Magnus, yet again placing his talismanic hand, so to speak, on the cold brow without result. "Strange—and the time is rapidly shortening, too."

With increased anxiety, he consulted his watch.

Half-past-eleven!

He produced a flask of brandy and one of liquidized ammonia, and applied their contents alternately, as he had done frequently before, to the brow, lips and nostrils of the unconscious man.

Still without effect—not the faintest quiver or hint of returning animation.

Knitting his brows, as the criticalness of the hour increased, he thrust his hand under the shroud, and pressed it almost fiercely over the heart.

Hal! what was that? A beat, a throb, a pulsation, howsoever faint?

No; scarcely.

"It beats! Away, thou dreamer! he is gone. It once was Lara whom thou look'st upon."

Pale, and with the perspiration streaming from his disappointed face, the detective withdrew his weird touch, for the most part so sensitive and potent in its majestic test.

Then, seizing a flask with either hand, in his excitement or impatience he fairly drenched the upturned face with some of the contents of each at the same instant.

Success!

Instantly there was a convulsive twitching of the theretofore rigid facial muscles, and this was followed by a faint but perceptible respiratory movement.

"Hal! at last!" and again the watcher's hand was thrust in over the reluctant heart.

A pulsation, this time an unmistakable one, though the merest flutter; and then a stronger, healthier, more distinctive one!

The next instant the detective had the dead-alive's head on his arm, and was administering small portions of the brandy, drop by drop, through the parched, colorless lips, and with a hand that was now as steadfast as a rock.

"Good! I knew I would fetch you to, sooner or later. How do you feel?"

Randall Maycourt was sitting up in the coffin, the face softening, the color slowly returning to lips and eyes.

"Take your time—don't be shocked or alarmed. All is well," cautioned the delighted detective, with his brave, encouraging smile. "Collect yourself as slowly as you please."

"No need!" gasped the restored man. "Don't you suppose that I know you—have known everything?"

"What! from the very first?"

"Yes, or nearly so. Good God, and the agony of it all! My poor mother—my poor sister—Grace, my betrothed—and that infernal hypocrite, Bartlow! Then those rascally undertakers who would so willingly have screwed me down!" He paused, faint, and with a gesture toward the flask.

"So, here you are!" And the detective mixed a stiff bumper, which the young man drained almost at a draught.

Then he stretched himself vigorously, and gratified his companion yet more pronouncedly by dragging himself out of his hateful confinement without assistance, though he trembled when upon his feet, and had to grasp the side of the bier for support.

"I never tasted liquor before to night," said he. "But I suppose there is some virtue in it, after all."

"I should say so!" cheerfully. "Better not have any more just now, however. Look here!"

And the detective led him to a little table in the corner, which he had supplied surreptitiously betimes with various dainty and appetizing dishes from the best hotel kitchen in the town.

"Here you are, my boy!" continued Magnus, arranging a chair, and making the restored young man sit up to the repast. "Force yourself to eat a little at a time—that is, if you haven't much of an appetite—and there is a capital bottle of California red wine to wash down what you can get away with."

Not much of an appetite!

The viands were at once attacked with famishing eagerness, and, his initial hunger being satisfied, Randall was even able to give his preserver an outline account of the strange and all but fatal entanglement that had overtaken him.

"Just as I divined it—just as I divined it!" commented the mind master, joyfully. "But, patience, my young friend; your revenge and vindication are secure—in fact, are at hand this very night."

"What! so soon?"

"Yes; and not much time can we afford to

lose. What do you see yonder, by way of a beginning?"

As the detective spoke, he pointed to one of the young man's complete suits of clothes, laid in readiness over the side of the bed; and there were also conveniences for a thorough toilet-making near at hand; all of which had been secretly provided from the apartment above by his intelligent foresight after the ladies had been persuaded to seek their retirement for the night.

"Mr. Magnus, you are a most wonderful man," said Randall Maycourt, with much simplicity, as he proceeded to avail himself of these welcome accommodations, without delay. "You see," with a smile that was still not a little wan, "I have made myself somewhat acquainted with you even while in my trance."

"Yes? it is all very odd but very fortunate."

"But for you, sir," and the young man paused to grasp his hand, with a sort of gasp, "I might have been buried alive!"

"Nonsense! think of something more enlivening. Hasten slowly now, and I will summon your mother and sister as soon as you are presentable."

"Oh, but they must be prepared."

"Leave that to me."

"You spoke of my being revenged—vindicated this very night?"

"True; and there is ample time. Why, you are looking almost yourself again. Now, I shall risk bringing in the ladies. After that, I must go for Mr. Grantby, so that you can tell your strange story in detail, once for all."

"But the scoundrel Bartlow?"

"He shall be attended to later on. Fear not; he is busily and unconsciously weaving already the net that is to snare him to his own undoing."

Apparently invigorated afresh by this hope held out to him, young Maycourt hurriedly completed his toilet, while Magnus quitted the room upon the delicate mission that was before him.

As the latter closed the door behind him, a light appeared at the head of the stairs, and he perceived Mrs. Maycourt standing there, fully dressed, her face wearing a wondering, somewhat startled look.

Then Ada made her appearance at her side, likewise looking alarmed.

"It is you, Mr. Magnus?" queried the elderly lady from above.

"Yes, ma'm," was the reply, and in a cheerier, heartier tone than they had yet heard from him.

"What is the matter, sir? I was sure I heard you conversing with some one, and my daughter was equally certain. And yet—"

"So you did," cheerier yet. "Step right down here, both of you. Easily now, and don't be unnecessarily alarmed. Joy shouldn't upset you beyond mending."

Joy? What could he mean? They both came down in trembling haste and mystification, the elder supported by the younger.

"Remember that I have warned you to take it easy," continued the detective. Dim as the light was, they could note the honest brightening that was in his dark, handsome face. "So, then, flutter a bit, if you must, but don't faint. You recollect that I told you to hope?"

"Yes, yes!" It was Miss Maycourt who managed to reply this time.

"And that your enlightenment should come soon?"

"Yes, yes; oh, sir!"

"It is come already. My friends, the dear one who was dead and seemingly disgraced is alive and vindicated!"

Here the door was opened, and with a suppressed cry, first the mother and then the sister were in Randall Maycourt's arms.

Magnus only lingered long enough to caution them to restrain their transports, and then, slipping out of the house, he hurried away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BANK PRESIDENT RECEIVES AN UNEXPECTED SURPRISE.

It was half-an-hour after midnight when the detective entered Mr. Grantby's grounds, and debated with himself as to how he might best communicate with the worthy bank president at that unseemly hour, without arousing the household, and especially without affording the housekeeper a suspicion as to what had occurred.

Fortune, however, seemed to favor him, for one of the second-story balconied windows at the side of the house, doubtless belonging to a large apartment that might be Mr. Grantby's own, showed a bright light, as if the occupant might be still stirring or awake.

At all events, he chanced it by tossing a pebble or two against the upper sash, the lower one being wide open, affording entrance for the cool summer air, which waved the rich lace curtains back and forth.

Then a spasm of disappointment seized him, for in response a statuette female figure, the head and shoulders partly concealed by a black lace mantle, looked wonderingly and a little suspiciously forth.

If it should prove to be Madame Renaud herself!

But the next instant he was relieved by the

figure stepping out on the balcony and standing revealed as that of Miss Grantby.

The detective stepped back into the moonlight and coughed, at the same time making a gesture of caution.

"What! it is you, Mr. Magnus?" the young lady said softly, recognizing him at once.

"Yes; I hope I didn't alarm you."

"It is of no consequence if you did."

"Miss Grantby, it is imperative that I should see your father out here at once, and without apprising you can guess whom. Is he long retired?"

"No; and he may not yet be asleep. I will see—that is—but what is it, Mr. Magnus?"

"Something very important—a discovery. He must accompany me to the cottage at once."

"But you were on watch there—you have deserted your post?"

"Never mind that," with an impatience which he strove to repress. "Will you let your father know as quietly as possible? I will await him around the corner in the shadow of the wall."

"A great discovery at the cottage, you say?" she was looking down at him with a wild eagerness and curiosity.

"Yes, yes: time passes."

"Oh, Mr. Magnus!" beseechingly; "mightn't I go too?"

"Impossible!" half-angrily.

"Please! I shall be so discreet; and papa will be sure to make a noise while blundering through the halls, if not piloted properly."

The detective hesitated, and then reflected. Why, after all, might she not partake of the mother's and sister's great joy, without the delay, that was after all not indispensable?

"Yes, then," he replied; "provided you make dispatch."

She quickly withdrew, with a gratified little sigh; and, as Magnus looked back while retracing his steps, she had already extinguished the light in her room.

Neither could he complain of the secrecy and dispatch with which his instructions were obeyed.

Indeed, very shortly after he had ensconced himself within the shadow of the outer garden wall he was joined by the young lady, with her august parent somewhat bewilderedly in tow, as you might say.

"Bless me! what is it, Magnus?" exclaimed the banker, though in a guarded tone. "Have you come across the missing bonds already?"

"You will hardly find fault with the discovery I have made, sir," replied the detective, evasively, while swiftly and silently leading the way through the deserted streets. "I'll answer for that."

"But, man alive, this is good news surely! though I can scarcely see the necessity of routing a man out of his bed at this beastly hour merely to tell him that you have lighted onto the stolen property."

"I did not say anything about stolen property, sir."

"What mystery is this?"

"None whatever; a discovery, or revelation, that you have had my promise for, that is all."

"But—"

"Dear papa, can't you let well enough alone?" interposed Grace, who had succeeded in mastering her own mystification in a measure. "In less than five minutes we will be there."

"Humph!" and the banker quickened his pace, while thrusting his hands in his pockets somewhat groutily.

But, when they arrived in front of the cottage, the parlor—which had been the chamber of death—was perceived to be brightly lighted up, and there came the confused hum of voices from within.

Then, as Mr. Grantby impatiently hurried forward in the lead, Grace suddenly seized the detective by the arm with a trembling grasp and drew him back.

"I know it all now," she whispered, the excitement of a great joy and thanksgiving lighting up the dark loveliness of her face and eyes. "Why did I not suspect your noble secret from the first?"

"Hush!"

"Death was only apparent—he is alive!"

"Hush! I beg of you!"

But she darted ahead of her father as the door was opened by Ada Maycourt.

There was an exclamation, an embrace, a kiss, the darting of one graceful figure past the other, and then the closing of the street-door, as Mr. Grantby and Magnus entered almost abreast.

Then the astounded banker entered the parlor, clutching the edge of the door-frame for support, and could only stare and glare.

For there, in the midst of the confused room, with the empty coffin and trestles thrust conspicuously to one side, was the dead-alive, Randall Maycourt himself; and, what was more to the point, with Grace Grantby sobbing out her joy upon his breast.

"Stop!" sternly exclaimed the detective, detaining the banker, who, the first amazement ended, would have rushed excitedly forward. "He is not only alive, but innocent, unstained—do you hear?"

"What, sir!" cried the old gentleman; "you answer for it?"

"On my life!"

"But how—what? Then there—there are none of the missing bonds recovered?"

"Not yet; though they will be presently—probably within an hour—and in possession of the real criminal, Catesby Bartlow."

"Man, you rave!"

"Do I? We shall see presently. But do sit down, my dear sir. We have first to learn the story of our young friend here, so fortunately brought back to life, honor—and a deserving true-love, too, it would seem."

The banker plunked down into the chair set for him, alternately rubbing his portly bald poll and gazing at the young couple, now comparatively drawn apart, though by no means ashamed of their momentary transports, and with Grace still holding her lover's hand, a quieter, serener joy settling into her still blushing face.

"Maycourt!" stupidly gasped the old gentleman; "Randall Maycourt?"

"Yes, sir; it is I!" exclaimed the young man, fervently. "Not dead, but living—risen from the death-in-like cataleptic trance which seems to have chained me in forced companionship with the grim destroyer—and with God-given strength and faculties to declare my innocence and expose another's crime—the crime that, but for this interposition, would doubtless have been fastened indelibly upon my name and fame!"

"Wonderful!" murmured Mr. Grantby, beginning to feel decidedly small, no less than bewildered. "Incredible!"

"No, sir; not incredible—wonderful, indeed, but true!" continued Maycourt. "And to whom do I owe it that I am here before you now, quick and living, torn from the living tomb that was so surely preparing for me"—he shuddered, while Grace drew yet again closer to his side—"thus enabled to declare my wrongs and revenge myself upon my wronger? To that man, and to him alone—God bless him!" he pointed to Magnus with softening eyes.

Grace quickly crossed the floor, and before the detective—who was already being metaphorically caressed, as you might say, by Mrs. Maycourt's and Ada's gratitude—could prevent it, seized his hand and kissed it.

The latter snatched his hand away almost roughly, while coloring uncomfortably.

"Nonsense!" he grumbled. "But why don't we hear the story? Time is precious, and time is passing."

CHAPTER XIX.

RANDALL MAYCOURT'S REMARKABLE STORY.

THE dead-alive accordingly began his story without any further delay.

"You will, perhaps, remember, sir," he began, looking respectfully at the banker, who had by this time roused himself to listen, while the others disposed themselves with rapt attention and expectancy, "that for some days I had spoken of feeling queer and out of sorts—altogether out of my ordinary healthful state, in fact.

"My mother and sister, at all events, recollect my complaining, though I did so only off-handedly to them, not wishing to alarm them unnecessarily. And, besides, I was not fully aware of my own critical condition, or I should have seen a physician at once.

"I suppose it was the cataleptic seizure slowly preparing to grasp me in its death-in-life embrace. Since then I have remembered that two of my forerunners, my grandfather and a granduncle on my mother's side, were thus afflicted, so that it was doubtless inherited on my part. At any rate, Dr. Beecham was either a fool or dishonest when he declared over my tranced body, when lying yonder, that he had long known me as liable to heart-failure. How plainly was I conscious of everything, though unable to move so much as a muscle! But when Mr. Magnus placed his touch over my heart there was a slight tantalizing sense of reviving in my frame, though too weak to manifest itself. However, let all this go.

"In spite of my novel feeling of illness and incapacity, I had some complicated accounts to balance which I was unwilling to leave undone. They had given me an infinite amount of trouble, the longed-for balance being just the thing I could not arrive at.

"It was on that memorable Tuesday evening—such a short time, and yet seemingly so long ago—that I had decided at the last moment to remain at the bank after the rest had gone. However, I had already told my mother and sister not to look for me at tea, and not to be alarmed if I should be detained.

"It had been a hot day, as you will all remember—an oppressively hot day—and, in spite of my determination to balance the books at any cost, I had been conscious all day long not only of a strange unwillingness, but almost of an absolute incapacity, to bestir myself.

"The insidious seizure was already stealing over me with accelerated steps I suppose.

"More than once I was conscious of a sudden numbness of the limbs. And on two separate occasions I had found myself momentarily incapable of rising from my office-stool.

"Having obtained a slight supper, I suppose

it was past six in the evening when I was again diligently at work over my books, all alone in the bank, the rest having quitted the place a good hour previously.

"In some extraordinary way, my limbs seemed suddenly to have passed in a measure from my control, an irresistible lassitude or inertia stole over me, and, while not in actual pain, I felt heavy, heavy, oh, so heavy!"

"Still, I fought it off as well as I could, and buckled down to my work.

"I was leaning forward over the columns of figures, racking and cudgeling my brains with the endeavor to think where the fugitive error in the accounts could be, when—oh, I shall never forget it!—in a single instant—in a flashing atom of time—I became aware of a yet more singular and startling sensation that was stealing over me.

"It was as if I had been abruptly immeshed in the diabolical spell of some remorselessly malignant power, which was rapidly, implacably depriving me of all power of motion, as indubitably as the insect helpless in the spider's tunneled web.

"An instant later, I was nailed to my high seat as immovably as if fastened there by the fell Destroyer himself.

"And here was the oddest, most contradictory part of it. While in the grip of this awful, paralyzing visitation, although I had utterly lost the use of my limbs, of my every muscle, I had preserved my faculties unimpaired. Indeed, they had even seemed sharpened and intensified for the time being in proportion as my physical powers were deadened and benumbed.

"I could see with admirable clearness, for instance—that is, straight in front of me; for not only could I not turn my head a hair's breadth to either one side or the other, but I could not even so much as shift the direction of my glance in the slightest degree.

"Only straight in front of me could I look and stare, with what I felt instinctively must be a fixed, glassy, corpse-like stare, just as if I had really turned into a corpse, with a thorough consciousness of the transformation, together with every horrifying mental anguish which such a state can suggest. And whatever there was directly in front of me, in full line of my intensified but restricted vision, that I could see with singular distinctness and intelligence.

"My faculty of hearing had become no less abnormally keen. I could distinguish by this sense many things of which I could not have had the slightest intimation in my natural state.

"As an illustration of this, I will mention that, notwithstanding this comparative isolation of the bank building, I could hear with marvelous distinctness every footstep that passed even on the further side of the street on which it fronted—a considerable distance for the sound of a footfall to travel, as you all must allow—but I could likewise hear the slight traffic on the adjoining thoroughfare far in the rear, even to the extent of catching chance scraps of conversation on the part of such street passers who exchanged greetings, or good-evenings, which must have been uttered in tones the reverse of loud or ringing.

"Worse then, this, far worse—for Heaven knows that in my then despairing mood I felt it as the worst of all!—I could *think* with equal clearness.

"Instantly, therefore, I knew what had seized me in its remorseless, invisible clutches.

"It was the long-dormant, but at last capriciously active, hereditary foe, catalepsy. I was in a cataleptic trance state.

"There was no physical pain whatever. Physically, I was a dead man, whose mind and spirit were still painfully active and powerful.

"And thus I sat riveted there, hour after hour, bodily dead, but with a mental agony gradually rising to such a pitch that I cannot but think of it now as infinitely surpassing any purely physical agony that the most morbid imagination can conceive.

"Of course, it had rapidly grown dark; had at last become so dark that my eyes were useless for any purposes of vision, and yet they would not shut, but must still stare on into the blackness of darkness that had closed around me. Silence, too, had fallen, likewise as a matter of course—the intense, hollow, empty silence of the deepening night.

"At last, however, a peculiar sound came to me out of that intense hollow silence of the great, high, vacant banking room.

"It was a most peculiar sound, as of some one who walked with muffled, or deadened, steps.

"I listened, as I could not, indeed, help doing, with all the unnatural acuteness of my sense of hearing.

"And then—what? Yes, the faint sound of a widow being cautiously, stealthily opened close at hand.

"Probably the only thing that had saved me from falling from the high stool to the floor when the fit had first seized me, was the circumstance that I was leaning far forward at the time, with the greater part of my weight on the desk. And so, caught, or petrified, in that curved, leaning, staring attitude, I remained, as if glued to the spot.

"Directly in front of me was a glass partition, on the other side of which was the inner office, in which the safe is kept.

It was the window of this inner office that was being stealthily opened now.

"And, by a strange fatality, since I could not alter the direction of my staring glance, the safe was directly in the line of my vision.

"Thus it was, as you will readily understand, that, though I could not at once see who it was that entered, I could nevertheless instantly behold the mysterious prowler the moment he should come between me and the safe.

"Everything was dark at first; then a light was struck, and some one, carrying a shaded lantern in his hand, suddenly appeared across my line of sight.

"That some one was Catesby Bartlow, the cashier, and the most trusted official in the bank.

"Probably you all know that I had never liked the man; and there was reason to believe on my part that my dislike and mistrust were returned with interest.

"But, for all that, my amazement was without bounds when I perceived that it was he.

"I had never really doubted his personal honesty; and now what, I asked myself, could have brought him there at such an hour and in such a way?

"He wore a linen duster, dark brown of color, that was closely buttoned down the front, but I could see that he was in full evening dress beneath, and the glitter of diamond studs in his shirt front, as if he was just from some dinner party, or fashionable gathering. He took a large key from his pocket, which, to my further astonishment, I recognized as the key of the combination safe lock—or its duplicate; for I knew, Mr. Grantby, of course, that the one original key was constantly in your custody, and, indeed, seldom, if ever, out of your possession."

The bank president nodded and bowed his forehead on his hand, with a disconsolate sigh that was very like a groan. Bartlow had thus far been his beau ideal, little short of his business idol, so to speak; and who is there among us that doesn't inwardly groan at having a cherished idol rudely, abruptly and incontinently shattered, and thus proved to have been but of worthless clay, an ignoble creation?

CHAPTER XX.

THE SPEECHLESS WITNESS—RANDALL MAYCOURT'S STORY CONCLUDED.

WHILE the rest of the young man's auditors had remained completely absorbed in their attention, Magnus, the Detective, had before this made several impatient movements as if desiring that the narration might be shortened or hastened, so that Randall made haste to conclude his strange story in a somewhat less leisurely strain.

"Of course," he went on, "I could now perceive indubitably that it was Mr. Bartlow's intention to rob the bank, and my former dislike for him was transformed into unmitigated hatred and contempt, accordingly.

"And yet I could not move a hair, nor articulate a syllable, to prevent the crime!

"He at once fitted the key into the safe, arranged the accompanying combination by the light of the lantern, which he no longer took the precaution to keep shaded, and speedily had the great doors of the money-vault open.

"From the interior he took a large quantity of bank-notes—I could distinctly hear them rustle—and several bags of gold coin, which jingled as he let them drop into the small valise that he had carried in his disengaged hand.

"Then he turned slightly around toward me, so that I could see him full in the face; though he had not as yet the remotest suspicion of my presence and speechless witnessing of his every movement.

"Secure, as he imagined himself, in his criminality, he even began to soliloquize in a low, chuckling tone, which struck me as having something demoniac in it, or at all events altogether foreign to his accustomed hearty and pleasing manner of speech.

"Aha," he muttered, "if that prim, strait-laced model of propriety, young Maycourt, could but see me now! Ha, ha, ha! Doubtless he would quickly solve the mystery of his accounts, which he finds such difficulty in balancing. Well, I suppose it's about time to close out my game with these suburban American chumps, though I had hoped to take the hand-some heiress with me on my travels. I couldn't have kept up the racket much longer, without some one or another of 'em tumbling to my true character, after all. As it is, I flatter myself that few men could have kept up the game so long as I have."

"Here he came a few steps forward, the lantern in his hand, and then suddenly stopped short.

"His eyes were fixed on the glass partition, while in his face there was an expression of the most horrible panic.

"His lips seemed parched, he gasped for breath, and I thought he was going into a convulsion. But he recovered sufficient control over himself to ward it off.

"Maycourt! Maycourt!" he gasped at last, in a husky, strangling sort of voice; "is it really you, or your ghost, your supernatural double? Good God! don't look like that. Your face, your eyes are simply horrible!"

"He shuddered, covering his own eyes with a trembling hand, to shut out the aspect of my looks, which seemed to awe and unnerve him.

"When he looked at me again, he was thoroughly self-mastered, and his mood had changed absolutely.

"Good heavens! it was my turn to be awed and horror-stricken then. His face, as he seemed to comprehend the truth of the strange situation and my helplessness at last, was as that of a fiend fresh from burning seething hell.

"Hatred, revenge, exultation, all were there, and with a ferocity, a diabolism of expression that is simply indescribable.

"Even with my wits, senses and physical powers suddenly restored to my command, I doubt if I would have been able to thwart him in opposition to that changed look, which would have been blasting or petrifying in itself.

"With quick, firm steps, he advanced to the partition-door and entered the inclosure where I was crouched, spellbound, over the desk.

"Oaf! I suppose you imagine you've caught and entrapped me!" he cried, in a sort of hoarse, muffled roar. "Oho! you are to be congratulated on your peeping-Tom shrewdness. But look out lest you may have found out too much for your continued well-being!"

"Then he seemed struck yet more by my unnatural attitude and immobility. He came a step nearer, his eyes snapping with mingled wonder, curiosity and exultance.

"Idiot, dolt, fool! Can't you speak?" he hissed between his set teeth. "Maycourt, I say, Maycourt!"

"He laid his hand on my shoulder, the lantern-gleam streaming full in my face.

"Then he started back with a suppressed cry, the brief return of the appalled look mingling wildly with the diabolism of his contorted features.

"Dead! he exclaimed. "Stone dead, by the splendor of hell!"

"The lantern fell from his hand with a glass-and-metal crash. Then, with a violent push, he sent me flying headlong to the floor.

"There where I fell I lay, like the unconscious dead; only recovering my mental faculties when finding myself lying here at home, in my unbroken physical trance.

"Of course, then I was not long in being made aware of the advantage the villain had taken of my condition by his foisting his own crime upon my shoulders—by blasting my fair reputation as unresistingly as the strange, insidious disease had laid hold of my body, to make it ready for a living grave. That is all."

The strange, scarcely credible story being finished, Mr. Grantby was one of the first to rouse himself.

"Horrible! appalling!" he exclaimed, clinching his hands bewilderedly. "But I can't believe it of Bartlow—I simply can't do it!"

But Magnus had also risen, stern, active, alert; and he consulted his watch, for perhaps the ninth or tenth time since the narrative had been begun.

"Ten minutes to two!" he exclaimed. "Come with me, sir, and you shall have ocular proof of the fellow's villainy. Quick now! Not another minute can be safely wasted. Come, Mr. Maycourt!"

Both those named seized their hats instantly.

"What does it mean?" cried the banker.

"Where would you take us, Magnus?"

"To the bank, to surprise Bartlow in the completion of his whilom interrupted crime," was the stern response. "The missing bonds, if I mistake not, will also be found on his person. Bome! He has got it down fine. In less than half-an-hour the through train should be due that he intends to convey him to the Canada border, with the proceeds of the plundered safe, in disguise."

Mr. Grantby was all but stupefied afresh.

"How on earth did you know all this?" he exclaimed.

"No matter, sir. Come!"

But here Mrs. Maycourt hurried forward, and seized her son's arm.

"But there may be danger, new peril!" she faltered.

"None for him, madam, depend on it," returned the detective. "Come, come!" And he bore them away with him.

As has been already intimated, the bank building was not far away.

Swiftly and stealthily the three men pursued their way through the silent intervening streets.

The Touch Detective had made no miscalculation, as the event was to prove.

They entered the bank grounds, and cautiously approached the side door and window.

"He is already at work on the safe—gutting its contents!" excitedly whispered young Maycourt, as they all came to a momentary pause just outside of the totally darkened building, and he bent his head eagerly. "Yes, yes!" exultantly, "his retribution is upon him—he will not escape us."

Mr. Grantby looked at him surprisedly at first,

then pityingly; while the detective made no sign one way or the other.

"Humph!" grunted the former, throwing back his coat, and looking up over the gloomy edifice. "Excuse me for saying it, gentlemen, but I am sadly afraid that this will prove the wildest of will-o'-the-wisp chases."

"Can you not hear him?" continued the young man, yet more excitedly and confidently. "There!" he bent his ear yet lower: "he is rustling bundles of crisp, new bank-notes, and you must hear that clink of the gold coin. Ha! that rustle again. By heaven! they are those missing bonds that you would have searched my poor mother's cottage so ruthlessly to find."

Mr. Granby looked at him yet more narrowly, evidently doubting his sanity in the best of good faith.

"Hear him, indeed? Why, what are you raving about, Randall?" he said, impatiently. "Are you mad?"

"No more than you are, sir!"

"Hear him?" repeated the banker. "What! when he is in the private office—if he is anywhere at all in the building—while we are out here in the yard?"

"Ah, but you forgot that I am the dead-alive. I can hear him, if you can't."

"He is doubtless right, sir," interposed the detective, in his low voice. "This is no abnormal fancy, I am sure."

"Quick; give me the key, or open the door yourself," continued Maycourt. "You have the key, Mr. Grantby. Every moment we waste increases his chance of escape."

"Right again!" put in Magnus. "Besides, it is best that he should take the lead in surprising the robber at his work. Give him the key, sir; or open the door."

The banker hesitated (how strong was his hope and belief in the handsome cashier still!) and then, producing the key, inserted it in the lock.

It turned without a sound, and without a sound the door swung open on its well-oiled hinges.

They stealthily entered the interior. It was pitch-black darkness.

"Hadn't we better have a light?" whispered Mr. Grantby. "I can't see my hand before my face. We'll surely be stumbling over something."

"Leave it to young Maycourt," replied the detective.

The young man had already slipped slightly ahead in the lead.

"I need no light," said he. "Remember, my eyes have grown used to the dark. You have only to keep close to me."

CHAPTER XXI.

CAUGHT IN THE ACT.

ON they groped, the dead-alive in the lead. Suddenly there was a pause.

"See!" whispered some one; "yonder is a light."

Sure enough, a light there was. It was in the inner room, that inner office in which the safe was kept.

As the banker came to a second pause beside Magnus, young Maycourt, slightly falling back, caught his arm.

"Sir!" he exclaimed almost fiercely under his breath, "you would still doubt me—would still doubt the good Magnus? But my hour for triumph is come. But you are on the threshold of seeing it all—you shall see the black-hearted, hypocritical criminal in the midst of his crime!"

A strange, suppressed fury seemed to possess the young man, standing thus in the vestibule of the court of vengeance, so to speak.

By the dim, ghostly light stealing out from the inner office, he loosened his coat and waist-coat, dropping them off to one side, together with his hat.

Thus, with the upper part of his form all in white, and with his features still in a measure drawn, haggard and chalk-like, as the lingering effects of his recent experience, combined with the intense excitement of this moment, he might readily recall to a startled imagination the stark figure in cerements that was so late an occupant of the funereal couch.

Then he stealthily led the way by the outer door into the compartment in which he had first been overtaken by that mysterious semblance of death which had made him both the silent witness and the victim of the villain's recent criminal attempt.

There were three silent witnesses looking through the glass partition now.

There, in the office beyond, they all saw Catesby Bartlow, lantern in hand, a traveling valise at his feet, at his nefarious work, busied with the contents of the safe.

Maycourt motioned his companions back and down out of sight.

Then he silently seated himself on the high stool, leaned forward in a fixed attitude over the desk and lightly tapped against the glass.

The robber caught the sound at once, but for the instant did not note whence it came.

Then he approached the partition.

As he did so the color fled his florid face, his jaw dropped, his hair slowly bristled up under his hat.

When he was quite close to the partition, trembling like a leaf, his knees knocking together, the dead-alive, seemingly still in his grave-clothes, rose straight up, staring him straight in the face—his ashen, horror-distorted face—raising his arms high above his head.

"Thief—hypocritical hound!" he cried in a strange, shrill voice; "caught in the act!"

A wild shriek rung through the building, as the criminal reeled back, clutching wildly at the air.

When the three men sprung into the room, which they did on the instant, they found him lying apparently in convulsions, the evidences of his crime—the money-stuffed valise, a great roll of bills still in the grip of his frenzied hand, the open safe-doors, the lantern dropped aside—surrounding him everywhere.

"Quick!" cried the detective, and with a snap he had the handcuffs over the fellow's wrists in an instant; "the lantern—don't let it go out. Better light the gas. Ha! what is that?"

The final exclamation was caused by a strange lurid flash suddenly springing up somewhere far in the rear, just as Maycourt snatched up the lantern, and while Mr. Grantby was reaching up to light a gas-jet.

At the same time there was a smell of powder, while the light in the rear increased by brilliant, fluctuating flashes that irregularly illuminated the entire bank interior.

"The cunning scoundrel!" roared Magnus—yes, even he, the ordinarily velvet-voiced, could roar on occasion, and terribly at that. "It's a mine—a prepared match—he has fired the building. Here, sir!" he thrust a cocked revolver into the banker's hand; "beware of his playing 'possum—keep that clapped against his head till I return. I must investigate and raise the alarm."

He darted away in the direction of the rear room from which the glare proceeded, and even as he did so the furious roaring of the flames could be heard.

Tearing open the door, the interior of the compartment was seen to be a mass of raging fire.

A rope was perceived dangling down through an open sort of air-shaft near at hand—a rope which Magnus at once divined to connect with an alarm bell in a belfry far above, for the purpose of meeting just such an emergency as this.

Seizing it, he at once rung out an alarm peal, sonorous and loud.

Just then, however, and while the entire vast interior was luridly lighted up by the kindling glare, a wild, snarling sort of shout or cry, as from a furious wild animal abruptly brought to bay, caused him to turn and look back to the spot where he had left the baffled robber under guard.

Baffled? Ay, but no longer.

Bartlow had just sprung to his feet, freed himself from the shackling nippers by a single wrenching twist of his herculean wrists, and was unexpectedly confronting his amazed, panic-stricken custodians with that appalling, that paralyzing aspect of diabolical fury that young Maycourt had mentioned as one of the master-scoundrel's unique characteristics—probably his chief trump-card in just such an emergency as this.

Case-hardened as he was, even the Touch Detective could no longer remain incredulous of the power of that awful change of aspect, even from the mere glimpse of it that was now afforded him.

It was, indeed, the living presentment of a demoniac personality—a Moloch incarnate—apparently fresh and hot from the hideous torture crypts of hell itself.

However, the recoil of the detective was but for an instant, and that but an effect of supreme surprise.

"Shoot him down without mercy!" he shouted to the banker, while springing to the rescue, and whipping out his own spare revolver as he did so. "Curse your sentiment! the fellow is a veteran criminal of a hundred *aliases*, whose record I have got dead to rights."

But it wasn't sentimentality, or, at least, not that alone, that was withholding the bank president, who, even more appalled than Maycourt himself, had shrunk back aghast, the point of his weapon lowered.

In another instant Bartlow had hurled him back, snatched the pistol from his hand, leveled it at the oncoming detective, point-blank, and fired.

Magnus felt the bullet cut the air within a hair's breadth of his ear-drum, and involuntarily paused, faint and dizzy for the instant.

Before he could quite recover, the robber burst into a fierce laugh, snatched up his plunder-packed valise, and dashed away toward the side-door, which had been left open.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he howled. "Did you hope to trap Cosmo Armsdale, the master-crook of Europe, with your stupid graveyard trick? Dots! The detective-genius doesn't breathe that can track the king vulture to his secret roost. Trapped in your turn, stay where you are—I have you caged—and roast, roast, sizzle and fry, while he wings his free way to the unknown!"

With that he dashed out of the opening, fling-

ing the heavy door to behind him with a resounding crash.

Unfortunately, the key had been left in the lock, they heard the turning of it, the swift shooting of the bolt from without.

"Good Lord!" cried the banker, awakening to sudden energy when too late, "there is something in the villain's threat, after all! How scorching hot it is getting in here already! Close up those safe-doors, Randall. Thank God! the vault is fireproof, any way, for what may be left in it. And look, look! All the iron blinds are down—that is why no light was visible from the outside—and it is a tedious process to raise even one of them by the crank."

All this was true, as a single glance around the interior, now lighted up to a tremendous brilliancy by the roaring conflagration that had by this time completely possessed the rear rooms, speedily made apparent.

Moreover, one of the partitions had already been burned through, and the heat was all but insupportable.

Mr. Grantby lost his head altogether for the moment, and began to fume and beat upon the door, without avail, as a matter of course; while Maycourt, much more self-possessed, attended to the reclosing of the vault doors, which, however, might prove a good deal like shutting the stable door behind a stolen horse.

But Magnus was once more as cool as a cucumber and active as an imp.

"Stand aside, sir!" he said, addressing the excited banker. "Do you forget that I have rung the alarm?"

CHAPTER XXII.

GONE!

THRUSTING the banker aside as he spoke, the detective took a brief look at the door-lock, and then forthwith emptied the chambers of his revolver into it in rapid succession.

"Hark!" said he; "your fire department is already getting to work. I can hear the shouts of the mob outside."

He seized the door at the knob and shook it with a strength of which he would scarcely have been suspected, but in vain.

The fastenings had been somewhat damaged by the shots, but still held firm.

But, not in the least discouraged, the detective coolly set about recharging his weapon.

"Mr. Maycourt," he called out, "I noticed a sort of lumber-room back yonder. Be good enough to see if you can obtain an ax, or any other sort of heavy tool, thereabouts."

Then he turned to Mr. Grantby a little impatiently, as the young man darted away in obedience to his instructions, while shielding his face from the extreme heat.

"Do calm yourself, sir!" he exclaimed. "It's a tough snap, but we'll get out of it."

"Oh, a tough snap?" fairly whimpered the banker. "I should say so—and a roasting hot one, too!"

Literally helpless with fear, he crouched down behind the partition and the bolted door to shield himself from the fierce heat and blaze, while Magnus recommenced firing, this time at the barred fanlight above, causing a crash of glass at every shot, but nothing more effectual.

Then Randall came running back from his search to announce it as useless, the lumber-room being already a mass of flames.

However, from encouraging shouts called out to them from outside, they became aware that their predicament was either known or surmised by the crowd.

Then there was a crash, splash, a ringing chorus of shouts, and a stream of water from one of the steam fire-engines came bursting its way in through the fanlight, drenching the scorched prisoners with its grateful spray.

Then came the blows of axes, the door was speedily burst in, and they were saved.

Leaving Mr. Grantby and Maycourt to make such hurried explanations as were demanded, the detective elbowed his way through the mob and hurried to the local Police Headquarters with notification of the robbery, and to set the telegraph wires to work in the hope of heading off the plunder-laden criminal.

But his face wore a discontented look when he rejoined the pair, half an hour later on, at the Maycourt cottage, whither they had hurriedly made their way, after escaping from the crowd, for the purpose of quieting the all but frantic alarm of the ladies awaiting them there.

"Too late!" was all he could say. "Of course, I telegraphed everywhere, and by this time the wires are also reaching out after him from the New York offices. But there isn't a particle of hope of heading off the scoundrel."

"Why not?" cried Mr. Grantby, now thoroughly recovered from and not a little mortified at his recent loss of nerve. "You say it was certain that he would head for the Canada border."

"No matter. With an ordinary professional, there would be a good chance of overhauling him. But Bartlow is a veteran, with a genius for disguises and subterfuges. Besides, the start he got was a good one."

"Heavens! how I was deceived in that man!" exclaimed Mr. Grantby, woeful in his humilia-

tion. "What, Magnus! and you knew of his criminal record from the outset?"

"More or less," was the quiet reply.

"But, heavens and earth, man! why didn't you warn me against him?"

The detective made a slight gesture which sufficiently comprehended their surroundings, for they were still in the front parlor, so recently the "chamber of death."

The gesture, of course, included the funereal trappings, still in full view, though thrust into the most inconspicuous corner, the widow and her daughter, yet painfully bearing the disturbing effects of the recent horror and excitement, and lastly the lovers, once more reunited side by side, with a content that the banker doubtless would not again have the courage or inconsistency to gainsay, and yet both care-worn and suffering still.

"Humph!" said the detective's gesture, quite as eloquently as words could have done; "a vast amount of good that would have done in your infatuated condition truly!"

Mr. Grantby rubbed his head vigorously, and, starting up in his chair, thumped himself down again hard.

"It is too bad—the worst experience of my career!" he cried, desperately. "To think of being taken in to this extent!" with a groan. "I sha'n't be able to look people in the face again. And then the bank both robbed—doubtless cleaned out—and burnt out! Oo, Lord!"

But Magnus, the detective, could be no less encouraging than satirical on occasion.

"Nonsense, sir!" he cried, hopefully. "You were no more played upon by the specious scoundrel than the rest of your directors; the bank, besides being fully insured against fire loss most probably, can stand the hundred thousand or so that this fellow has perhaps got away with; and there is still the chance of running him down, and recovering. Besides, you must have your private fortune intact, to say nothing of this happiness in store for you." With a smiling gesture toward the lovers, still fast by one another, though now Grace blushingly ran over to her father's side, and threw her arms about him.

Then Mrs. Maycourt likewise took the banker's hand, also murmuring her encouragement, while both Randall and his sister managed to say something appropriately well timed, so that Mr. Grantby, though still disconsolate, began to face the misfortune with something more of his accustomed manliness and resolution.

"Yes, yes, insured, of course!" he still groaned. "But a hundred thousand dollars! Good Lord, Magnus! you think it possible that the villain could have got away with that much?"

"I can simply," was the reply, "show his record as that of one of the cleverest, most accomplished all-round scoundrels in the world. Such a one would not be likely to content himself with less of a haul than that. There are the missing bonds, for one item. I doubt not that yet others will be found missing when the books can be examined. Then he most probably grabbed all the cash there was in the safe, except perhaps some of the coin, which would have proved too heavy for him."

"There wasn't much coin, as near as I can remember, but at least sixty thousand in banknotes. Wasn't he the cashier, who could have perfected his preliminaries accordingly? Oh, Lord!" And Mr. Grantby struck the arm of his chair sharply with his clinched hand.

"Still, the wicked man will have left some clew by which he can be traced," suggested Mrs. Maycourt. "He lived sumptuously in those rooms of his, I have been told, and would scarcely have been able to carry off all his personal belongings."

Magnus quickly shook his head.

"Nothing will be found there," he said, confidently. "Such birds as Cosmo Armsdale, alias Catesby Bartlow, never leave a tell-tale feather behind them—save by accident."

"And yet you will undertake his pursuit?" cried the banker, eagerly. "You are not without hope of eventually running him down for us, and recovering our property, at least in part?"

"I trust so."

"And yet how can you do that, if, as you predict, he left no clew?"

"I said that he might have left one by accident. Here it is."

As the detective spoke, he produced a very handsome bosom scarf, containing a small but valuable ruby and sapphire pin in a very unique old-gold setting of fanciful design.

"It must have dropped out of Bartlow's bosom in that wrenching struggle of his that freed him of the handcuffs," he said, simply, as they examined the article with attention. "At all events, I picked it up just there where he had last stood."

"Bartlow had many such gewgaws," said Mr. Grantby, "but I don't remember to have noticed this particular one before. It is a very unusual design, this pin."

"So much the better."

"Do you hope to make use of this trifle in tracking him down?"

"Sooner or later, yes. That must depend,

however, on just what brought this into my possession, chance, or accident."

Then the detective, securing the scarf and pin, rose and held out his hand.

"Good-by, for the present," he said. "It is almost broad day, and I'm off."

"What?" said Mr. Grantby; "back to New York?"

"Yes; to make my report. It will take you some little time to put your business house in order. If you want me to take up the trail later on, telegraph, please. In the mean time, if your real thief is at last up and away into the unknown, at least," smilingly and with a motion of the delicate white hand toward Grace Grantby and Randall Maycourt, who had once more come in contact with the naturalness of two water-drops on the same gossamer strand, "I may have accomplished something, though scarcely altogether anticipated, as perhaps you will acknowledge."

For answer Mr. Grantby grasped his hand with unwonted emotion.

"Well, I should say so!" he exclaimed, heartily. "Good heavens! what would we have done, what might have happened"—he gave a little shiver—without you, Magnus?"

Then, going up to the loving pair, he shook them both warmly by the hand, adding, with a forced laugh:

"Kismet, as the Moslems say. What must be must be, and may you be happy, my dears!"

"Nothing could be better—a rainbow cut of much nasty weather!" commented Magnus, quietly. He made a slight movement, signing back the lovers, who were hurrying toward him with their acknowledgments. "Now, Mr. Grantby," turning to go, "a last word of warning before I go."

"What is that?" cried the banker

"Beware of Madame Renaud!"

"Bless me! what of her?"

"She has been Bartlow's secret confederate from the start; and maybe—though she should have the benefit of the uncertainty on this point—his wife!"

Mr. Grantby shrunk back, all but appalled; and in the general confusion consequent on this announcement, the detective skipped out of the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TOUCH DETECTIVE AGAIN IN DEMAND.

IT was several months later that Carolus Magnus, on entering the private office of Mr. Blinkerton, his chief, directly after his return from a protracted and difficult detective mission in a far Southwestern city, was greeted by the latter in the following words:

"You're wanted on that Mount Keron case again, Magnus. Here is a letter for you that may explain things."

"Good!" commented Magnus, after reading the letter.

"What is it, if I may ask?"

"Certainly. The *pseudo* bank cashier again."

"But he got away with that swag intact, didn't he?"

"Yes, without leaving a trace; though the bank managed to stand the loss, together with its half-gutting out by the fire, and was soon financially on its pins again, I believe."

"Well, what now?"

"The banker is about to take his daughter to Paris, along with her affianced—the dead-alive young bookkeeper, you will remember, who, it seems, has never wholly recovered from the shock he underwent."

"Shouldn't think he would. What else?"

"Mr. Grantby has got an idea that track can be got of Bartlow, *alias* Armsdale, over there, and proposes for me to accompany them in my professional capacity."

"Humph! and what do you think about it?"

"I think I had better go."

"You think it likely that Armsdale is in Paris?"

"There or elsewhere on the Continent."

"What gives you the impression?"

"You doubtless saw the recent account of Antoine Bordone, the king of the Parisian pickpockets, being nabbed at last?"

"Yes; what has that got to do with it?"

"The rascal is really an English crook, Anthony Bordon, as you are doubtless aware."

"Yes."

"Well, here is something new for you. He is also Cosmo Armsdale's brother-in-law and bosom chum."

"Hallo! you are sure?"

"Quite; I have been taking a quiet and inquiring interest in the cashier ever since he lit out with that big pile. He ought to have his suspicions as to pursuit somewhat lulled to rest by this time. And if Bordon is in real trouble, his Pythias should be secretly on hand, to afford him such assistance as he can."

"That's reasonable. Go ahead, then."

"Thanks, chief. Nothing could suit me better."

"All right. I'll give you the necessary official credentials at once. When do they start?"

"In three days, by the next regular French steamer."

"Here you are, then," and Mr. Blinkerton,

who had set to writing, handed him an official-looking document. "And good-luck to you!"

"Oh, I'll fasten on to the fellow for keeps this time, chief, provided there's the least tangible clew," said the Touch Detective, confidently. "I feel it in my fibers; and, moreover, it's a matter of professional pride with me as you must know."

"Naturally enough. But hold on a minute," with a detaining sign, as Magnus was about hurrying away, with a peculiar look of satisfaction in his dark, delicate face. "There is a woman in the original case?"

"Yes, the banker's housekeeper."

"Bartlow's confederate and wife, too, eh?"

"Yes."

"What became of her?"

"Can't say; though my parting advice, by letter from here, was that she should be retained in her employment, without suspecting that her prior relations with the fellow had even been so much as guessed at."

"It might help you out if it should prove that your advice had been followed out to the letter. Eh?"

"I think it might. But that is almost too much to expect. You see, there would arise certain complications in the way of such a course—but we shall see."

"Well, take care of yourself among the Frenchmen," was Mr. Blinkerton's parting injunction to his most valuable and trusted subordinate. "Though you are not without experience among them, they may not prove so susceptible," with a smile, "to your touch tactics as others have been."

"Good-by, chief! I'll simply, as heretofore, do my best." And then the detective hurried away to answer the letter and make his preparations.

Arriving in Mount Keron on the morning of the day fixed for the departure, Magnus, instead of going direct to the bank or Mr. Grantby's residence, proceeded first to the Maycourt cottage, with a springing familiarity of step and bearing that hinted of more than one unobtrusive visit thither since his rather-sensational parting with the inmates thereof as recorded in our last chapter.

In fact, this was the truth, and as Ada Maycourt, who chanced to be alone on his present arrival, opened the door for him, she not only extended her hand with a greeting and happy blush, but even submitted to a chaste and lover-like kiss upon her pure forehead in the most natural manner in the world.

Love at sight had developed into love indeed and love in earnest.

The handsome detective had not been so busy professionally but that he had been enabled to press his suit both by letter and more than a few personal visits, and the pair were but recently engaged, though with nothing definitely fixed as yet with regard to the future.

"My darling, how lovely you are looking!" exclaimed Magnus, tenderly embracing the fair girl. "What?" as they entered the well-known little parlor, though now brightened up beyond all recollection of its erst lugubrious associations; "and I am to have you all alone to myself here? What magnificent luck!"

"Don't be so sure of it, dearest," with a laugh, as she submitted to yet another kiss, and then made him sit down more at his distance. "Mamma is only visiting a few doors away, and may be back at any moment."

"But what of that? or if Randall should also show up unexpectedly, for that matter?" cried Magnus, his face aglow with pleasure. "Just one more, Ada, and then—"

"Not one!" still smiling, though with a maidenly dignity that really did put him on his behavior with respect to the conveniences at once.

"But I am really very happy, Carolus!" with sparkling eyes.

"Cupid be praised for that! But then so am I, you see. Odd that neither one of us should appear particularly uncomfortable, isn't it?" And, then they both laughed together.

"And you are really to accompany us to Paris?" cried Ada, joyously. "Mr. Grantby called last evening to show us your letter."

"With us?" echoed the young man. "What? and you are going too?"

"Yes, yes! Mr. Grantby would have it so, and you can well believe that I was more than willing."

"Excuse my profanity, my dear, but by Jupiter! this is more happiness than I bargained for," cried Magnus, fairly delectated. "In fact, it is altogether too much!" he was on his feet again, fluttering about her where she still remained seated. "Think of my being just back from that odious Galveston trip, that kept me six weeks from you!"

"During which you wrote me a letter every day, and sometimes two."

"No matter; I simply must, my angel, whether you permit it or not!" And he once more caught her in his arms, and kissed her, in spite of her protests, and this time to his heart's content.

"You see," Ada explained, when her lover had once more been brought to order, "Randall, though constantly improving, is still not yet quite his old robust self again, notwithstanding

that he is now become a partner in the bank, and that our worldly affairs are greatly improved generally."

"That is splendid," said Magnus, nodding. "Yes, I heard of Randall's good fortune. Wasn't he made cashier also?"

"Yes; though of course he, together with his prospective father-in-law, will throw up everything for the time being now. But, you see, Randall is still not strong. And, inasmuch as Grace and he are not to be married until later on—perhaps in Paris, or elsewhere abroad—it was suggested that my sisterly companionship would help along the proprieties, as you might say. As if there could be any real proprieties conserved under the circumstances!" She bit her lip and colored.

"What do you mean, Ada?"

"That odious woman!"

"Ah, Madame Renaud, of course?"

"Whom else could I speak of thus?"

"True. But what! She has been kept in the dark as to our knowledge of her ever since?"

"You would think so, if you could see how Papa Granby surrenders to her fascinations, regardless of the past—or seems to, at all events, I am not certain which."

"So! and she goes along?"

"Yes; the idea! But for that mamma might have consented to accompany us."

"Ah!" and the detective began to understand the situation. "Then your good mother will not be one of us?"

"Indeed, no!"

"How does Miss Grantby relish the idea?"

"Probably no better than I, though she makes no protest, I believe. Of course, the woman goes somewhat in the capacity of her chaperon, or maid, or something of the sort."

"Good, good! better than I had dared to hope!" And Magnus rubbed his white hands softly.

"What! you can say that, Carolus?"

"Of course. Don't look vexed, sweetheart. The woman, all unawares, shall be my chief bait in angling for that fugitive fish, Bartlow, in the foreign waters. But you will presently understand better."

Here the return of Mrs. Maycourt interrupted them, and her two hands were extended in their unaffected welcoming of her daughter's detective suitor.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUTWARD BOUND.

"You have heard, ma'm," Magnus smilingly said, after responding becomingly to Mrs. Maycourt's pleasant greeting, which was about all that an idolized daughter's fortunate lover could desire, "that I am to be one of the voyagers?"

"Yes, Mr. Magnus," was the no less smiling reply, "and glad enough to know it, I am sure."

"Thanks! You see, it will give me an excellent task to look after this young lady here, while she is assisting Miss Grantby in looking after our dear Randall."

"This young lady is duly grateful, as a matter of course," laughingly interposed Ada, "though perhaps she would be quite well able to look after herself."

"No, no!" said her mother. "It is most fortunate Mr. Magnus is going, since I know you will be lost without me to look out for you, as heretofore."

Magnus was agreeably surprised at the improvement that had taken place in the widow since his first making of her acquaintance under the painful circumstances with which we are familiar.

In fact, Mrs. Maycourt, once more her old sweet, untroubled self, was a most agreeable and pretty woman, whose forty-five years were vastly discounted by her matronly plumpness, nicely preserved comeliness, and her still sparkling gray eyes and abundant fair hair, the latter as yet without a suspicion of the poetic but undesirable 'silver threads among the gold.'

"But, my dear madam," cried the detective, "Ada is not to be deprived of your motherly care at all."

"I do not understand you," said the widow. "How can that be?"

"Because you are to accompany us."

"You are greatly mistaken, sir!" And she looked at both him and her daughter in surprise.

"No, I am sure of it." He took her hand. "Just wait till I can confer elsewhere, and I engage to convince you that it will be far best for you to be one of the tourist party, and without any sacrifice of your dignity either."

"It is not to be thought of," protested Mrs. Maycourt, though not imperatively, since, to tell the truth, she had only adhered to her original refusal to make one of the party at no little sacrifice to her secret inclinations. "Besides, in any event, it would be now too late for me to get ready for the voyage."

"Nonsense! where there is a will there is a way," he cried, gayly. "What couldn't a woman of your energy and resources do in packing up between now and this evening, when we are to board the steamer? Besides," gallantly kissing her pretty hands, with a side smile at Ada, "there shall be two parties instead of one, if you only say so—just the trio of us, pretty much

all to ourselves, with myself as traveling courier and protector combined; while the Granby set, Randall and the objectionable Renaud included, will doubtless make no demur at the division of forces. Come now, dearest Mamma Maycourt that is to be, you might as well say yes on the spot as later on!"

Ada clapped her hands, having instantly fallen in with the idea.

"I will help her to get ready, Carolus," she exclaimed. "Do you go and make the new arrangement with Mr. Granby at once, and by the time you are back mamma shall have definitely consented. No objections in order, mamma. The house here can be looked after by Mrs. Johnson, next door, just as we would have arranged it had you consented to go at the outset."

Magnus went to see Mr. Granby and Randall at the bank forthwith, and then went home with the former to lunch, where the programme as revised by him was ratified accordingly.

While both the banker and his daughter were delighted to know that Mrs. Maycourt was at last to be one of the party, Madame Renaud seemed also pleased, though the expressions which she ventured upon to that effect struck the detective as more or less hypocritical, which was perhaps no more than could be expected, since, even apart from the fact of Mrs. Maycourt having been the banker's earliest passion, with the possibility of his still regarding her with a lingering tenderness, the two women had never made any disguise of their mutual dislike and mistrust.

However, the handsome housekeeper had changed considerably for the better, as Magnus could not help acknowledging to himself, though there was at the same time something that puzzled him in the change.

Handsome, more stately and regal-looking than ever, she was, nevertheless, more subdued, and even not a little demure; or was it merely the watchful and calculated discreetness, born of past warnings, and all the more intent upon ultimately entrapping her prey?

"More circumspect, therefore the more dangerous," was the detective's mental comment.

"More suave, hence doubtless the more deadly."

However, he could not be so certain of his condemnatory criticism at first, and neither could he make up his mind whether the banker was really falling under the charm of the woman's undeniable powers of fascination, or was merely making believe to that effect.

Magnus's dissatisfaction gradually resolved itself into such unanswered self-questionings as these:

Does she suspect what we know of her, and penetrate our waiting game for the chance of her betraying both Bartlow and herself?

Can she really care for the banker, or is she complacently agreeable to this foreign trip, for the mere purpose of leading us all into new trouble, blunders and mystification, that she may reap the fruits thereof at her leisure, and doubtless with the master-crook's assistance?

Is the banker merely making a pretense of being fascinated, in accordance with my advised plan for lulling her into a sense of security?

If so, can he hope to play the game successfully, with such a deep one as this woman holding the opposing hand?

May not Mrs. Maycourt and her daughter be exposed to the constant secret resentment and spite of this *intriguante* during the entire foreign trip?

Answer to all queries, save the last: Conundrum—give it up for the present.

Answer to last query: This is one of the main things that I am especially to guard them against.

Mrs. Maycourt gave her final consent to become one of the voyagers, and before the close of the day all were snugly berthed on board the *Impérieuse*, a fine steamer of the French line, and at that time reckoned one of the greyhounds of the seas.

It was Magnus's third or fourth voyage abroad, and, besides speaking French with the fluency of a native, he was an accomplished linguist in several other foreign tongues, while his general experience in Paris and elsewhere could scarcely fail to be of great usefulness to the rest of the party, not one of whom, with the single exception of Madame Renaud, had ever crossed the Atlantic before.

But the young ladies and Randall Maycourt could also speak French fairly well, while both Mrs. Maycourt and the banker were not without a useful smattering of the tongue.

Thus it chanced that the entire party were much better equipped than is ordinarily the case for the pleasurable success of a first trip abroad, since it had been decided beforehand that the major part of the sojourn was to be confined to *La Belle France*, chiefly in Paris.

It was the month of May, one of the most agreeable for transatlantic voyaging.

On the third or fourth evening out, everything having thus far proceeded auspiciously, our tourists were enjoying themselves quietly on the after-upper deck in a somewhat desultory chat, when Mr. Granby managed to signal Magnus, and the pair strolled forward, ostensibly for the enjoyment of an extra post-prandial cigar, leaving

Randall to entertain the ladies without assistance.

"Go with them, if you wish, Ran," said Grace, with her customary considerateness. "It isn't fair for us to monopolize you so completely; and that story," he had been reading aloud from a magazine, "will easily keep till later on."

But the young man had divined what had escaped her—that the truant pair were desirous of conversing alone—and he was, moreover, content to remain where he was.

Still recuperating but slowly from his shocking cataleptiform attack, though months had intervened, Randall had, nevertheless, improved much more rapidly since starting upon the voyage, and the flush of returning health was now much more pronounced and constant in his thoughtful, melancholy face.

"What, you would get rid of me?" he replied, smiling. "But why not be more frank about it, my dear, and counsel me to jump overboard forthwith? The sea is always convenient for self-eradication; or I might break my neck by a misstep into one of the stoke-holes, if more convenient."

"Indeed! or perhaps the captain might be persuaded to yard-arm you at a pinch," returned Grace, bursting into a laugh, in which she was joined by Mrs. Maycourt and Ada.

"Horrible!" interposed Madame Renaud, in French, and dropping some elegant needlework into her lap, she held up her hands in real or mock consternation. "My dear mademoiselle, how can you suggest such a barbarity even in jest?"

"Oh, it's no difference," observed Randall, lazily, "since I am quite content as I am, and, moreover, wouldn't dare venture upon a second cigar. By the way, though, where did they drift to, those truant birds of passage?"

"Yonder they are!" And Miss Grantby pointed to where her father and Magnus were standing some distance forward, overlooking the guard-rail just forward of the port davits, with their attention seemingly divided by something going on in the steerage fore-deck below. "And—dear me! what is that?"

Here she started up in no little alarm, her example being followed by her companions and pretty much every other lounger in sight, as a significant cry rung out hoarsely from somewhere below.

"Man overboard!" that was the cry—always a startling one at sea.

Almost at the same instant they saw Carolus Magnus shed his hat, coat, waistcoat and shoes with almost the expertness of a lightning-change artist of the variety stage, and vault over the rail into the sea.

CHAPTER XXV.

A USEFUL WAIF.

If the Touch Detective could have doubted the genuineness of Ada Maycourt's reciprocation of his passion, he would have been amply gratified to have perceived her at that moment.

She had staggered back, clutching her mother's arm, her face wild and ghastly with unselfish panic and consternation.

"Don't be alarmed—please look to her, Grace!" interposed Randall, authoritatively, while not only Grace, but also Madame Renaud sympathetically bestirred herself. "Now wait just here till I can bring you word."

He ran to the spot whence the detective had made his leap, and from which Mr. Granby had also by this time disappeared; and almost immediately the ladies were relieved of their anxiety by his waving his hand back to them encouragingly, and even with a smiling face.

A few minutes later he rejoined them, saying composedly:

"It's all right. They're both picked up by a boat, and neither of them any the worse off than for a ducking."

"Both!" queried both young ladies, breathlessly.

"Yes. A poor devil of a steerage passenger, who either jumped or tumbled overboard, and couldn't swim, and Magnus, who jumped after him. But the sea is like a mill-pond—though the screw might have carried 'em under its flukes, but for his superb address—and it must have been just fun for Carolus. That's all. He'll doubtless be along with his quiet little joke about it when he can have had time to change his clothes."

Here Mr. Granby put in a reappearance with his version of the affair, which was substantially the same.

"A generous and prompt rescue!" he commented, in conclusion. "Everybody is talking about it. One would hardly expect such impulsiveness from so cool a card as Magnus."

"Some would," interposed Ada Maycourt, quietly, the excitement now replaced by a proud, happy look in her sweet face. "Who was the man he rescued, sir?"

"Doubtless a mere pauper—a swarthy, sallow-faced Frenchman, willing enough for the oblivion he perhaps courted, and therefore less grateful than vexed with his rescue," was the indifferent reply. "The idea of Magnus risking his life for such a fellow! There is the oddity of it."

"The beauty of it, I should say," said Ada.

"And I, too, my dear," warmly seconded Grace, with a bright look, her hand on her own lover's arm with a contented, proprietary air.

"Indeed, yes," murmured Randall, his arm instinctively stealing around her as they resumed their seats. "To risk one's life for a friend—what is that? But to risk it for the friendless stranger—well, it's a little Christlike, to say the least. You needn't be ashamed of that blush, sissy"—to Ada. "Brothers-in-law may not always be desirable"—with a pleasant laugh—"but you won't be the only one glad to have Carolus Magnus in the family."

In the mean time the detective was on the steerage deck, bending over the form of the stranger whom he had rescued from a watery grave, the pair forming the center of a small group, chiefly composed of deck-hands, steerage passengers and others, curious, interested or indifferent.

A young man, this stranger, but miserably attired, disconsolate-looking, and at the same time with something either furtive or hang-dog in his face; furthermore, undersized and half starved-looking, though perhaps athletic and spry on occasion, or if better fed and with a fairer chance generally.

Possibly a French artisan in the hardest luck, struggling back as a bruiser waif to beloved France from intolerable hard knocks in the New World—possibly an obscure fugitive from justice; but at all events, and undeniably, as decidedly unprepossessing a specimen of animated flotsam and jetsam as is often dragged out of the great human undertow, or thrown up by random wind and wave for the curious inspection of such as go down to the sea in great ships.

Still bewildered, the fellow sat up after a second prolonged pull at the flask of brandy which his rescuer had obtained from one of the stewards in order to place to his lips.

Then he gave Magnus a half-resentful, half-grateful look, hastily pulled down and rebutted at the wrist one of his shirt-sleeves, which had slipped up to the exposure of the greater part of the left arm—he wore no coat or jacket—and, with some little assistance, rose to his feet.

"Of course, monsieur has my acknowledgments!" he growled, in French, in a sullen undertone. "But why couldn't he let a chap drown, that's nothing left to live for?" with a characteristic shrug of the shoulders, that had something both desperate and pathetic about it.

"Don't be too sure of there being nothing left to live for, my man," responded the detective, cheerfully. "You are yet young, and may find a friend in me. It happens," with a peculiar smile, "that I am somewhat interested in you."

The man gave a sudden start, and threw his preserver a swift, suspicious look.

"You were feeling in particular hard luck, I suppose?" continued Magnus, yet more kindly.

"Monsieur, I was so hard beat as to not care whether I got back to France or not," was the reply; "and that is a good deal for a Frenchman to say."

"I should think so."

"My last sou went to paying my fare down here," desperately. "And monsieur ought to see what we get," he threw a cautious glance about him, "if we are unable to stake the stewards. It isn't fit to throw to a dog!"

"But that may be remedied. Did you ever serve as a gentleman's valet or body-servant?"

"Yes," eagerly. "In fact, it was my sole vocation before"—he paused abruptly, lowering his eyes—"before fate was dead against me," in a low voice.

Magnus called the chief steward of the steerage, ordering him to give the man a bang-up dinner, including a bottle of good red wine, at his expense; and then, as the fellow was taken in charge accordingly, left further word for him to come to his own cabin when the meal should have been disposed of.

The detective was leisurely making his fresh toilette when the man put in an appearance, less than half an hour later on, looking well-fed and bright-eyed, though as shabby as before, having merely permitted his miserable clothes to dry on his person.

"What is your name?" And Magnus signed him to be seated.

"Achille Mourier," promptly.

"The real one?"

"Yes, monsieur," still frankly; "though I confess to having sailed under a false flag or two."

"That is well. You shall be my valet forthwith, at two hundred franks a month and found, if agreeable."

"Agreeable! May the good God bless you, monsieur! I swear to serve monsieur faithfully!"

"Tush!" with a repetition of the peculiar smile. "You will not dare to do otherwise. Give me your hand."

Achille Mourier did so, though seemingly with some uneasiness, and then started and turned pale as the detective's delicate hand closed upon his coarser one.

"I hope monsieur is not the devil!" he murmured, with evident sincerity.

"Hardly that," smiling. "Try again."

"A clairvoyant, then—a magnetizer—a *meriste*—a touch-man!"

"That is better. Given kind treatment, then, I don't believe you could betray me if you would?"

"Monsieur is right," with a little shiver, after which he was permitted to withdraw his hand. "Nor would I if I could."

Magnus nodded, and laughed again, though more naturally.

Then, presenting the man with a hand-mirror, he signed him to survey his face in it.

Mourier started as he did so.

"The deuce!" he muttered, with unconcealed vexation. "And yet I might have expected it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the Touch Detective, good-naturedly. "You went into the sea a brown man, and you came out of it a fair man—a blonde! Eh, Achille Mourier?"

The latter gave a grimace, but made the best of his exposure.

"Monsieur, it is the truth," he replied, with much simplicity. "But let monsieur remember that I did not expect or wish to come out of it at all."

"True, true! So you found pocket-picking harder work in America than in Paris, and were on your way back to reenlist under the fatherly regimental standard Antoine Bordone, otherwise Anthony Bordon, the King of the Pickpockets? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mousieur," stammered the other, in no little consternation, "really—you see—that is—"

"Peste! look here." The detective stripped up the sleeve which the fellow had so hastily replaced on the steerage deck, and pointed to to the upper arm thus disclosed. "There you are. Do you think I didn't catch a glimpse of that even before you fell into the sea? However, be easy, Achille. I would have rescued you in any event, though perhaps with a little less avidity than I did."

Legibly pricked in India ink on the white flesh thus exposed, were the words, "Frere de la Confrerie de A. B."

The detective laughingly translated it aloud, thus: "Brother of the Antoine Bordone Brotherhood;" adding: "But that will do, Achille. It shall get you into no trouble, if you stick to me."

"I am monsieur's faithful servant from this moment," replied the waif, replacing the sleeve once more. "But surely," with renewed earnestness, "monsieur is the devil?"

"No; only a detective."

The man started again, turning pale, but with a close-lipped resolute expression.

CHAPTER XXVI. ACHILLE MOURIER.

"DON'T be alarmed, Achille," observed Magnus, reassuringly. "Detective as I am, I have nothing against your whilom chief, nor will you be expected to betray him, or a single one of your regularly accredited confreres."

"Thanks, monsieur," replied Mourier, already much relieved. "Monsieur is a real gentleman whom I shall be proud to serve."

"Good! I shall see to that. Here!" Magnus opened one of his valises, and handed out therefrom a spare gray suit of his own, but little worn. "Put these on, and then," he gave him some money, "run down to the barber. In the mean time, I will arrange the difference of fare with the purser, and have you installed within call as my valet. When you are in good shape, seek me where I will be with my friends directly after, or in the general saloon."

Achille had assumed the garments with the dispatch of an expert in love with his task, and, as he and his new master were very nearly of a size, they fitted him fairly.

He was not without his share of human vanity. He surveyed himself, piece by piece, in the larger glass, fore and aft, now on this side, now on that, now on tiptoe, now stooping, now with his head over his shoulder, until it seemed that he would never be done with admiring his transformation to his satisfaction.

Then, falling upon his knees, he seized the detective's hand, and raised it to his lips repeatedly.

"My benefactor! my preserver!" he exclaimed. "But wait till I shall have been to the barber. Ah, monsieur will be proud of me then! I am a fine fellow at my best. Was it for nothing that I was known as 'Gentleman Mourier' and 'Handsome Achille' among the grisettes and shop girls of the Montmartre? Ah, I think not."

"That will do," said Magnus, laughing again. "Get up and go now. But wait!"

"Shall I put the finishing touches on monsieur's toilette?"

"No. But tell me, have you ever met in the past one, a brother-in-law of the great Antoine, calling himself Arnsdale, or otherwise?"

"What! the magnificent blonde, as we called him—the Superb English Swell of the many disguises?"

"Very likely."

"Have I met him? I should say so. Still not frequently. He was of different clay from us poor devils of the *confrerie*—a grand fellow, who would look at nothing but a bank safe or a jewel-box."

"Would he know *you*? that is what I want to know."

"I think not, monsieur; in fact, it is quite certain that he would not. I was nothing more than the dirt under such a grand swell's feet—quite beneath his notice."

"That is fortunate. He is my man."

"Monsieur can depend on his Achille. Le Blonde Magnifique, though a friend of the great Antoine's, was never of our brotherhood."

"Had you learned that Antoine is in the grip of the police at last?"

"Ala-s, yes, monsieur! But it will not be for long. Ab! I cannot understand. A man of his genius, his nobility, to soil his hands in practical crookedness! The stupidity of it!" with a sad shake of the head. "Softening of the brain, perhaps, or a love-affair, which is much the same thing. He to be nabbed? How have the mighty fallen!"

His sorrow seemed truly heartfelt. One would have thought it the shattering of a lifetime idol, or a prince of the blood being caught at card cheating.

"One thing more," cautioned the detective. "Should it prove that you may have also met one of the—ahem!—ladies of my party before, you are to be duly on your guard."

"I shall be discreet, monsieur."

When Achille had gone, Magnus hastened to arrange for the change in the fellow's traveling status and accommodations, and then rejoined his friends on the after deck.

The daylight was still lingering, and the greeting accorded him was all that could be expected or desired.

Especially did Ada give him her hand with a heightened color, and a proud, tender look in her sweet eyes, that was particularly gratifying.

"It was not only good fun, but may be to my profit," he cried, gayly, after their congratulations had in some measure exhausted themselves. "I shall apply to be appointed official life-saver on board the Imperieuse."

"How is it with the fellow you picked up?" asked Mr. Grantby, indifferently.

"Fairly well," was the reply. "He is to be my valet, and will show up in that capacity presently."

"Your valet?"

"To be sure! And why not?"

"That ill-kempt, beggarly-looking rascal?"

"Ah, but there are transformations, my friend. See, he is here."

In fact, Achille at this moment put in a soft-footed and obsequious appearance, suggesting something of a prig, it is true, but still so vastly improved in almost every way that it is doubtful if his mother would have known him, though "the grisettes and shop girls of the Montmartre" might have been delectated with the change that had been wrought.

"Achille, my light top-coat," ordered the new master. "You will find it on the second hook from my cabin door. Here is the key."

Achille respectfully vanished upon the errand, but not before he had shot a furtive, perhaps somewhat startled look at Madame Renaud, in whose eyelids there was noticeable a just perceptible quiver in response, but nothing more.

The top-coat being duly brought, Achille was more permanently eliminated by being ordered to look after the new accommodations that had been secured for him, and then to remain within call.

"You are to be complimented on your judgment, Monsieur Magnus," Madame Renaud said, with the smiling graciousness to which he was now quite accustomed from her. "The poor man will most likely make an efficient and faithful valet."

"And what a change in the rascal!" observed the banker. "However, I can't think what you can want with a valet, Magnus. I am perhaps richer than you," with a laugh, "and yet wouldn't think of putting on style to that extent."

"Or to any other extent, dear papa," corrected his dutiful daughter. "But the self-abnegation is becoming enough in your case, of course."

"Well," explained the detective, "the fellow seems to know his Paris perfectly, you see, and it struck me that he might be of some slight service in helping me to get on the track of that rascal Bartlow once again. That is all. Otherwise I should have very little personal use for him, most probably."

He made it a point to be perfectly frank before Madame Renaud, as well as with the rest of the party with regard to his individual mission abroad, as a matter of course.

"Still, Mr. Magnus," observed the housekeeper, interestedly, "it is well that you will be on your guard as to trusting this strange young man in any matter of importance, before thoroughly testing him."

"Trust me for that, ma'm, and thanks to you just the same," Magnus answered, urbanely.

"But what prompts you particularly to the warning, allow me to ask?"

"Er, well, I also happen to know my Paris fairly well, my friend. And, if I mistake not, the genus to which your new acquisition belongs was apparent to me the moment I set eyes on him."

"I shall be grateful for your judgment, ma'm. Under what genus would you classify him, then?"

"Oh, the genus homo, of course," with her seductive laugh. "But of the species *rogue*, or I am very much mistaken."

"You're to be congratulated on your penetration, ma'm," earnestly. "Yes, you have intuitively got Achille Mourier down pretty fine, according to the admissions or semi-admissions that I managed to force out of him, as a preliminary."

"I wouldn't have anything to do with the fellow, though of course it is no affair of mine," interposed Mr. Grantby, with his sometime bluntness. "These haphazard chaps, that come from nobody knows where, I have little confidence in them. It's ten to one that you'll pick up an adventurer or rascal in fostering 'em."

"As you, perhaps, ought to know by experience, Monsieur Profundity!" laughed the Renaud, playfully tapping him with her fan; a growing familiarity that was every day more pronouncedly apparent, to Grace Grantby's secret resentment and disgust, though she managed to conceal the feeling with more or less success. "Ah! your perspicacity was so vindicated in the case of that fine man of affairs, the magnificent Bartlow?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A CONFERENCE.

THE banker pulled a rather rueful face at this piece of banter, but managed to force a laugh.

"Still," he grumbled, "you must allow for that villain's real fascinations, and that he did not come to us without the highest recommendations."

"Forged ones, eh, monsieur?" with a yet pleasanter laugh.

"Yes, yes, I suppose so," pettishly. "And I also suppose that I am never to hear the last of that. But don't forget, belle madame," with a smile at last in answer to her fascinating glance, "that there were others who were no less deceived in the man than I."

"Eh, well, I'll acknowledge as much for myself, if you will be real good," and madame arose with a little shiver, and with a coquettish sign to him that brought him to the task of arranging her wrap a little more snugly about her magnificent shoulders. "Still, my friend, (Thanks!) I would assuredly have warned you against that specious man, but for the hopelessness of your infatuation for him. However, we can still hope that he is ultimately to be brought to account for his villainy. Shall you try your skill with me at piquet again this evening?"

"Not at once, belle madame, at all events," was Mr. Grantby's response, with a gallant air. "First, at least, I shall try a parting cigar with Magnus, since we were so interrupted in our former essay." And, linking his arm with the detective's, he strolled forward with him.

Then, as the night air was growing chill, the ladies and Randall retired from the deck in a body, the Renaud leading the retreat with her stately figure and truly superb walk, which was little short of the melody of motion, and Grace Grantby, for one, following on her lover's arm, with her pretty teeth set hard behind her compressed lips.

"How long," she exclaimed to Randall, with suppressed fury, at the first opportunity, "must policy compel us to put up uncomplainingly with this creature's insolence? I have grown to hate her just immensely!"

"Hush!" he cautioned. "It will not be interminably, I trust; and meantime it is policy to dissemble as you must allow. Even Carolus recommends it, and he would not tolerate the woman if he thought he could avoid it safely."

"But I sometimes doubt if papa is really playing a part; while madame's beauty—such as it is—makes me tremble lest he should really lose his head, or in some way commit himself irretrievably."

"So do I. However, let us trust in Magnus, and hope for the best."

The banker and the detective had once more come to a pause a little forward of the port long-boat, where it hung at its davits, and the former had hurriedly taken up their conference where it had been interrupted.

"Then you were beginning to fear, Magnus," said he, "that I might be really submitting to the fascinations of the fair Renaud?"

"Unconscious to yourself, perhaps, sir," was the detective's reply. "And I am still not without my apprehensions, I confess."

"Dismiss them, then, once for all," observed the banker, with sudden gravity, and yet not without a certain anxiety. "I am bulwarked, my dear sir, and perhaps more thoroughly than you can wholly conceive."

"Thank Heaven for that!" exclaimed Magnus, apparently much relieved. "So much the better."

"And yet I want to explain myself," continued Mr. Grantby. "The case is just this way: While I don't attempt to deny that the beauty of this woman is not without its fascination for me—Bless me! I'm flesh and blood, for all my staid principle and my desire to do the honora-

ble thing—the knowledge of her true character mostly recurs to me with such force that I find the utmost difficulty in treating her with common decency. You understand?"

"Yes."

"And yet again I feel that I am acting a contemptible part in even half-deceiving her, as I do, by pretending to regard her as a worthy and good woman, no less than an attractive one."

"Well, try to carry it out, at all events. It may not be for much longer, I hope."

"Yes, yes; but that isn't the worst of it," and Mr. Grantby's tone became more and more exasperated. "There is Madeleine—Mrs. Maycourt—you know."

"So! and what of her?"

"Good Lord! but what must she think of me through it all, to say nothing of my own daughter and Grace?"

"Still, they understand the necessity, I think. I have done my share in trying to make them understand it, at all events, and I think that Randall has done or is doing the same."

"But women can never understand such a thing properly, Madeleine, especially!" Here the banker fairly groaned. "By Jupiter, Magnus! notwithstanding how necessary it may be, in the way of assisting you in running down Bartlow, and recovering the bank's money, I don't see how I can carry the thing through."

His distress was so genuine that Magnus pitied him greatly, though he hesitated for the appropriate reply with which to encourage him.

"It's just torture for me!" the banker blurted out. "You see—by Heaven, it is just this way with me, Magnus! I—I love Madeleine, and would gladly—more gladly than you can conceive—make her my second wife. That is the misery of it. And yet how can I ask her to become such, or," wildly, "earn anything but her continued contempt by keeping up this unmanly course with another woman?—and such a woman! It's just killing me by inches, sir!"

"Bear up, sir—bear up, and carry it out to the end!" Magnus urged, earnestly and anxiously. "It will not be for long, now—I feel sure of that. This chance of my falling in with this young Frenchman to-day may help us out materially."

"What! he can really be of use to you in Paris, you think?"

"Yes; though I cannot venture to explain how, as yet."

Here a figure approached, which proved to be that of Achille Mourier, and as he appeared to wish to communicate something to the detective in private, the latter parted with Mr. Grantby with such further encouragement as he could offer.

"What is it, Achille?" demanded Magnus, as soon as they were alone.

"The grand blonde lady, monsieur," replied the man.

"Ahi! you recognized her, then?"

"Recognize the sister of the great Antoine Bordone, monsieur? I should say so, indeed! First, with monsieur's traveling-party; and then again just now."

"Just now?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"When again?"

"Spying here upon you and monsieur, the banker—secretly picking up every word that was dropped."

"Ha! say you so?"

"In very truth, monsieur. Ah, a sly and cat-footed one is the magnificent blonde! Blood must speak, monsieur. It is not for nothing that she is of our royal family—that is, a sister of the great, the only King Antoine."

"Where was she?"

"Crouched just yonder behind the boat, monsieur; and not so much muffled but that I recognized her as she skipped away. I am rather good at seeing in the dark, monsieur."

"Achille, this is important, and you are making a good beginning. It is necessary that you should know more of this—lady."

"At monsieur's pleasure."

"She is the wife of 'my man.'"

"That, too? I shall track her like a cat, watch her like a lynx!"

"When had you seen her last?"

"Years ago when, as a mere girl, she was visiting his highness the great Antoine."

"Does she recognize you in turn, think you?"

"I think not."

"She is not one of your sacred brotherhood, I trust?"

"Not she; no, no! If she is monsieur's game, she is henceforth mine."

"That is well. You cannot be too watchful—too much on your guard."

"Will monsieur permit a question?"

"Yes."

"The great blonde, is it that she has her designs upon monsieur the banker?"

"Yes."

"The situation is transparent, monsieur. Trust in me."

Nothing more was said, and there was little more worthy of particular note during the voyage.

The party arrived at Paris four days later, and took up their quarters at the Hotel des Deux Freres, a retired but choice establishment but a

step or two apart from the roar and glitter of the great boulevards, and yet not of them—select, well-ordered, yet in the great swim.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PARIS.

UNKNOWN to any of his party, save perhaps to Achille, his valet, Magnus early paid his respects to the Prefecture of Police, and after that seemed to have no interest in anything but enjoying himself and assisting his companions to do the same amid the whirling sights of the gay capital under his able and intelligent guidance.

In this agreeable manner there fast slipped away the first fortnight, which was apparently enjoyed to the full by every one with the single exception of the banker, who at last impatiently sought out the detective.

"You seem to be doing nothing in your quest of the robber," he exclaimed.

"If I seem that, it is well," was the cheerful reply, "for I am really doing all that can be done."

"You are uncommonly secret about it," sarcastically.

"Necessarily," was the imperturbable reply.

"And you, my dear sir, are not happy, I infer?"

"Happy? I am in purgatory! Madeleine will hardly even speak to me now."

"A tribute to your good acting of your part. The fair Renaud is still lavish of her seductive blandishments, I perceive."

"I should say so!" with a half-groan. "That is the worst of it. I sometimes fear she may make me her captive irretrievably, in spite of myself."

"No; you will escape her. This for a heartener for you: Look out that she doesn't poison your coffee or your wine."

Mr. Grantby glared at him wildly.

"Good God! what can you mean?" he gasped.

"Madame overheard all that passed between us in that last little conversation of ours aboard ship. And Achille caught her eye yesterday when she was about to deposit a pinch of white powder in your *cafe au lait* (coffee with milk). Then she desisted. But don't be unnecessarily alarmed. Knowing that she is watched, she isn't likely to try that particular dodge again."

But the poor gentleman was by this time positively haggard.

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed, rubbing up his one bald spot energetically; "the sorceress will make way with me before I know it. And what else can be expected of her, now that she knows all?"

"Calm yourself. All will be well. Achille and I are constantly on the watch, and not for nothing, you may be sure."

"Why did you not tell me of this before?"

"It would not have been for the best, believe me. You are only told now to relieve you of anxiety lest she should ultimately net you unawares."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Yes, assuredly," with an encouraging smile.

"Take heart! She may murder you, but can no longer hope to entrap you into a proposal of marriage, you may be sure."

"Thanks! Ha, ha, ha! What an immense sensation of relief you afford me!" and the worthy man laughed a little hysterically. "Well, let the sword descend, the secret dagger pierce, the poison permeate! Better the shambles than Hymen! Ha, ha! Truly, this is highly comforting, not to say delectable."

Magnus took his arm, earnestness taking the place of his bantering air.

"Kiss your chains—hang on to her chariot-wheel—well, for yet another week!" he urged, impressively. "Then—well, the outlook is brightening."

"What?" and Mr. Grantby really braced himself up; "you are on the track?"

"Yes; though I can tell you no more at present. Possess your soul in patience, that is all I ask."

"Well, I'll do my best. This is an improvement, anyway." And the banker went off to head a ladies' sight-seeing expedition in better spirits than he had known for many a long day."

This was in Magnus's hotel room.

"Poor old chap!" the detective muttered, comiseratingly, as the door closed behind the other.

"A thankless task, truly, and pretty dear payment for that fool infatuation of his for the brilliant cashier. I only hope that I may not have given out hopes prematurely."

There was a trace of anxiety in his tone, which did not wholly disappear as the door opened to meet the now trusted and indefatigable Achille.

"You have seen your royal master, Bordone, again?" he demanded.

"Yes, monsieur," replied the valet, animatedly. "He was in improved spirits, too, was the prince. The order was expected for his transfer from Salpetriere to Mazas, a much more dignified prison. A good sign, monsieur," rubbing his hands with genuine satisfaction. "The great Antoine may receive his discharge under surveillance at almost any day. Ha!"

Like many of his predecessors, and as many of his successors since, invested with the uncrowned purple of Parisian roguery, Antoine

Bordone, King of the Paris Pickpockets, had, up to the unpardonable, not to say unprincely, stupidity of getting himself under vulgar arrest, enjoyed a reputation which, if not wholly unenviable, was little short of national.

Just when he had quitted Seven Dials, London, the spot of his nativity and earlier aspirations, for Paris, as offering a wider and more seductive field for his surreptitious activity, was never known.

It was rumored, however—though this may have been one of the plebeian calumnies to which the unfortunate owners of the blood royal are so persistently a prey—that he had originally flitted to France to avoid serving a long term in an English prison. It was only certain that the careless Parisian world had awakened one fine morning to find Monsieur Antoine Bordone—therefore plain Tony Bordon—a part of it.

To a slender, graceful figure, always faultlessly attired, a pale face, with a sad or bored look, small hands and shapely feet, he added the finishing gloss of perfect manners and a distinguished air.

Naturally a master of men, from the foot of the rogue's ladder and individual light-fingered work on an unpretentious scale, little by little he rose to "bossism" in his vocation, resigning the vulgar work to such pals, admirers and "subjects" as his personal magnetism and superior cleverness speedily won for him from the great fraternity of pocket-picking Parisians. Finally he became head of a confrerie bearing his name, governed by secret regulations, and symbolized by a prescribed brand of brotherhood on the arm of each, which rapidly grew into a solid and systemized power of nefarious import. The king of this band of miscreants was its organizing head and executive soul. He confined himself exclusively to the planning and specific assignment of sneak-thefts and light-fingered operations for the army of rascals who came to owe him their sworn allegiance.

Everywhere, finally, Antoine, the elegant and irreproachable Antoine, was king of the pickpockets in fact no less than in name.

Not only did he frequent the best restaurants, cafes and hotels (in fact, the Hotel des Trois Frères among the latter, which had chiefly prompted Magnus in the selection thereof as the headquarters of his traveling party), but his was a constant and familiar figure at the race-courses, the baths, at every resort of wealth and fashion, and always, we may be sure, with a piercing and discriminating eye for promising faces, plump pocket-books and costly personal ornaments.

Too shrewd ever to be caught red-handed himself, and with a power that was notorious, he enjoyed the respect of the police, the consideration of the great jockeys, and even something more than the passing notice of the *beau-monde*. With the darker but equally seductive half-world, or *demi-monde*, as it is called, he would literally have nothing to do, notwithstanding he was naturally its secret idol, and that it was the natural source and home of nineteen twentieths of his recruits and veteran operators.

"My gloves soil so easily," he was wont to say philosophically to his valet, in one of his bending moods. "Give me the best of toilet soap, or pure water—the *creme de la creme*" (highest society) "or annihilation."

However, whether from an unfortunate love affair or otherwise, Antoine grew melancholy and careless. Therefore his Waterloo and an enforced abdication was in store for him.

Perhaps his *inamorata* was capricious, business dull, the world temporarily dark. Nevertheless, he was collared, red-handed, by an irate American tourist, whose fat pocket-book he was in the very act of purloining at the race for the grand prize of the Paris Jockey Club, and, unfortunately for fallen and misguided royalty, a *sergeant de ville* was conveniently near at hand, who forthwith hurried him off to prison.

The arrest had caused a sensation. Paris could not believe its eyes and ears at first. The king himself to descend so low, the blood royal thus to forget its cerulean exclusiveness! It could scarcely be credited, but of course materialized with sufficient solidity in the cold, crystallizing light of fact, after which the careless insect hum was renewed, and the gay world whirled on uninterruptedly as before.

However, the American victim—perhaps a good-natured "Mr. Barnes, of New York," or "Mr. Potter, of Texas"—was not disposed to be relentless; and there were, moreover, understood to be friends and money at work in the interest of the indiscreet monarch's fallen greatness. The police still held on, to be sure, but with a growing perfumtoriness that might at any time become conditional leniency, and so the matter stood.

"The mysterious secret friend is still at work for him in the background, I suppose?" queried Magnus. "That is what I want to know."

"Yes, monsieur," was Achille's response.

"And still a mystery?"

"Not wholly so now, monsieur," said the valet, brightly. "His highness is, of course, still reticent, but—there are things that slip out."

"Ah! Has our Renaud ventured to communicate with him as yet?"

"No, no. She is doubtless too shrewd for that, monsieur."

"Doubtless. Well, as to his majesty's chief mysterious friend in need?"

"Eh, well, monsieur, he is a magnificent florid gentleman—in fact, *our man!* That much slipped out. There can be no question about it. But he has only once called at the prison in person, and that was considerably before our arrival in Paris. Since then he has irregularly communicated with Monsieur Antoine, always by a different messenger, but always *from the same point*."

"What point is that?"

"Soissons."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Is this all you have learned?"

"Every iota. I really wish it was more, monsieur, but—"

"It will do at a pinch. Help me to get ready at once. And you must keep a redoubled watch on the Renaud in my absence."

"Monsieur is going on a journey?"

"Of course—to Soissons."

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN EVENTFUL JOURNEY.

THE city of Soissons is sixty-five miles north-east of Paris on the railroad to Laon.

It was an hour before noon when the Touch Detective was in readiness, and twenty minutes later he was in the train *en route*.

In suddenly determining upon this journey, he was not so much prompted by a hope of alighting upon Bartlow's immediate trail—in fact, he rather realized that there was but a small chance of this as yet—as by a certain premonition, or vague magnetic intimation, to which his peculiarly sensitive organization was susceptible at infrequent and irregular intervals, that he was on the verge of some unusual experience or discovery.

This might not have any relation whatever to the quest in hand, but the feeling had made itself manifest more than once during the morning with a persistence and urgency that were unmistakable.

He had, therefore, not attempted any disguise, as he might otherwise have done, nor even stopped to say good-bye to Ada and her mother, though he had intrusted Achille with a few reassuring words for the former, in the event of his return being delayed later than the accustomed *table d'hôte* dinner hour of seven.

Arriving at Soissons, with the mysterious premonition still strong upon him, he made a certain number of cautious and judicious inquiries, but without a particle of avail.

A brief but exhaustive tour through the suspicious quarters of the town, under the guidance of an intelligent local detective, to whom he made certain confidences as to the object of his quest, met with no better success.

Greatly disappointed, and yet with his impersonal confidence, so to speak, undiminished, he finally took the four o'clock return train, which would land him at his hotel in ample season to dress for dinner, at all events.

At the X station, however, a gentleman entered the coach, of which the detective chanced to be the sole occupant till then, and seated himself directly opposite.

Instantly Magnus experienced a sort of thrill, and, managing to touch the gentleman's hand as the latter made himself comfortable, this was felt in a more pronounced and significant form.

The forewarned happening was evidently on the verge of disclosing itself—materializing, as they would say nowadays.

Magnus smiled inwardly, kept his best wits on edge, and waited expectantly.

It was not for long.

The new-comer was in an affable humor, and it was not long before he was engaged in conversation with his prepossessing fellow-traveler.

"You are not English, monsieur?" observed the gentleman. "No. American, eh? But I might have guessed it, you Americans are so cosmopolitan, so agreeably non-exclusive, as I might say, while your traveling Englishman, what is he? An animated iceberg, a humanized machine, with the ridiculous insularity added. A fine day, monsieur?"

In less than ten minutes he had informed the detective that he was the Baron de Boisgmont; and in twice that time Magnus was more or less acquainted with the baron's opinions on the political situation, Sarah Bernhardt, Sardou's last play, the new conquests in the Soudan, Bismarck's special hoggishness from an ultra French point of view, and the stock variety of Parisian topics.

The baron was an elderly but well-preserved man, elegantly dressed, and conspicuous in the button-hole of his coat was the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor.

He was going to Paris, he said, but would stop at A—, where he had horses in training for the forthcoming big event of the French turf.

"But," observed Magnus, "I was not aware that this Express stopped at A—."

"It will stop for me," laughed Monsieur the Baron, complacently. "When one happens to be a shareholder of the railroad one travels on, accommodations can sometimes be had for the

asking. Eh, monsieur?" chuckling. "Perhaps they manage the privileges similarly in America?"

"Very similarly," was the response.

The detective was then about to say something else in rejoinder, when he noticed that his companion's expression had suddenly changed—in fact, that he was now gaping and staring at him as if looking at a ghost, or in a manner that was little short of offensive, to say the least.

"It is coming, whatever it is," thought Magnus to himself, and he held himself in patient expectancy accordingly.

The baron's eyes were riveted sternly now, even suspiciously, on the detective's breast.

Suddenly he bent forward, and said, very gravely:

"Excuse me, monsieur, but it strikes me that it is a very odd scarf-pin you are wearing."

Magnus instinctively flushed—an incident that was not lost upon his companion, as he looked at and placed his hand upon his bosom.

In choosing a scarf while preparing for his journey, with Achille's assistance, he had, unreflectingly and with the most absolute inadvertence (or was it fatality?) selected the one with the peculiar pin attached which had been his unexpected find or trophy following upon the safe-robbing cashier's extraordinary flight from the burning bank building.

In fact, he had about forgotten that it was in his possession, and, having assumed it at last in a fit of abstraction, was now not a little startled, though at the same time not altogether dissatisfied, to find that it was the means of drawing his companion out, as you might say.

"It is coming," he thought, with no little self-complacency. "Good! and with my will-o'-the-wisp, Bartlow, comfortably mixed up with it into the bargain. Well, well!"

"The pin is curious, monsieur," he replied, with studied coldness. "In fact, I don't mind saying that I never saw its like before."

The baron mumbled something that sounded very like, "Humph! I should say not, nor any one else."

Then, adding something, more audibly and politely, about being a connoisseur of rare bijouterie, or gew-gaws, he asked if he might look at it more closely.

Magnus willingly complied, taking the pin out of the tie and handing it over, while observing the other with intense, though concealed, curiosity.

The baron examined the pin critically, holding it up in a variety of lights, and seemingly not a little agitated while doing so.

"The same, the same!" he indistinctly murmured, under his breath. "The ruby and sapphire in the identical unique setting. Ah, there can be no mistake!"

He at last handed it back, with a short: "Thanks, monsieur," and abruptly changed his place to the seat in the furthermost corner of the compartment, his chin upon his breast, his eyes fixed upon Magnus sternly and suspiciously.

"What did you think of it, monsieur?" inquired the detective, greatly puzzled, and yet more hopefully expectant of he knew not what than mystified. "Rather a singular design, is it not?"

Not a word did the erst affable Baron de Boisgmont vouchsafe in reply, his eyes never for an instant losing their watchful gaze.

Magnus laughed a little contemptuously, shrugged his shoulders, and, still secretly watchful on his own part, settled down to the perusal of a periodical.

A brief halt was made at A—, where the guard came to the door to inform the baron, with much respectfulness, that his destination was reached.

"Never mind," replied the baron, abruptly, and in a very determined way. "I have changed my plan, and shall go through to Paris. A— a pressing evening engagement, that has just occurred to me."

On dashed the train, and Paris was presently reached.

Magnus was met at the station by Achille, who informed him that his entire traveling party were gone on a pleasure to Versailles, where they hoped that he would meet them for dinner, after which it was proposed to make up a box for the Grand Opera.

"I believe I shall not go," said the detective. "Take your way back to the hotel alone, Achille, and wait for me. The evening is so fine that I will stretch my legs a bit, and perhaps dine alone at the Cafe Anglais."

It was a long walk from the station to the boulevard on which the celebrated *cafe* is located, and he was both tired and hungry when he entered it.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SCARF PIN.

"I WONDER what has become of my premonition," thought the detective, as he selected a table and ordered his dinner. "It would be sufficiently tantalizing to have it dwindle out into nothingness in this unsatisfactory manner. But no; the end is not yet, or my premonitory experience of the past is altogether at fault."

He was right in retaining his confidence in the warning.

Having no special engagement or attraction for the evening, since he could not spend it in Ada's society after his agreeable custom, he lingered long over his dinner, which was a most tempting one, and then wasted yet another hour with the comic and satirical periodicals.

He was passing out of the bureau of the *cafe*, after buying a cigar, when he unexpectedly found himself face to face once more with the Baron de Boisgmont.

The latter merely inclined his head very slightly, and then passed into the bureau, turning his head to stare not at the detective's face, but at the bosom-pin, as if to assure himself beyond a doubt that it was still being worn.

Magnus would, perhaps, have lost his temper over the gentleman's persistent rudeness (besides thinking it strange that he should have followed him,) but for his inquisitiveness as to the outcome of this strange behavior, which had by this time become quite overpowering.

However, he again contented himself with a shrug of the shoulders—a French characteristic which had already fastened itself upon him—and, stepping out of the *cafe*, strolled leisurely up the boulevard.

One of the largest and gayest thoroughfares of the world's gayest capital, it was brilliantly lighted and thronged with animated crowds, all seemingly care-free and on pleasure solely bent.

But, as Magnus was easily making his way among them, with a roving glance at a bright interior on this side, a dashing equipage on that, he suddenly found his path purposely blocked, apparently, by a shabby, disreputable-looking individual, who seemed to eye him interestedly.

He slid out of the way, however, but only to re-appear just as obtrusively at the corner of the Rue de l'Opera, and yet a third time, after a second evanishment, in the vicinity of the Place Vendome.

What could the fellow mean? for Magnus was too much preoccupied with other thoughts to attach the significance to the incident that his professional experience would otherwise have enabled him to do on the instant.

Finally, as he was turning off into the Rue Richelieu, in order to reach his hotel, the fellow came boldly up to him, and, laying a particularly dirty hand on his shoulder, thrust an open document under his eyes.

"Ah, an alms-begging petition!" thought the detective. "This is rather a new dodge."

And he was feeling in his pocket for a small coin, when the man said gruffly—that is, gruffly for Paris, where even the loafers and footpads are more or less polite:

"Shoot that, monsieur! It's an order of arrest. I am instructed to secure your person. Best come quietly, without attempting a scene."

Magnus gave an astonished start, and then, instantly his alert, watchful self, he glanced over the paper.

The man had spoken truly. It was a regularly printed form, the blanks filled out in scrawling chirography, and bearing a decidedly formidable, authoritative-looking signature, to the following effect:

"BUREAU DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY,

"PARIS, April —, —.

"We, duly accredited Juge d'Instruction, command the bearer of this order, Pierre Flaubert, as our agent, to bring before us One Carolus Magnus, American, sojourning at the Hotel des Deux Freres, when and where found, upon identification.

"A. B. RAMEAU,

"Juge d'Instruction."

A *lettre de cachet*—an order of arrest!

The American detective shrugged his shoulders, and smiled.

Often as he had arrested others, this was the first time that he had ever been placed under arrest himself.

It was certainly a novel sensation in his experience, but not altogether a disagreeable one under the peculiar circumstances.

Besides affording him a practical insight as to how they conduct such things in France, was he not about to receive a final enlightenment as to his premonition of the morning—the Baron de Boisgmont's strange action, and the mystery of the scarf-pin included, to say nothing of the fugitive Bartlow's indirect connection with the entanglement, and whatever else it might lead to!

In fact, he did not even think of taking the fellow with him to the hotel, of sending for his valet, or of blinking the matter in the least.

"The deuce!" he thought, complacently. "They've lost no time in following me up and spotting me, at all events. Come, they are not so much behind us as they might be here in France, after all."

Then, assuming a very innocent and somewhat alarmed air, he turned to the server of the warrant, and said:

"What is a man to do who is quite ignorant of your French laws? I am sure I don't know what this means."

"It is plain enough," was the surly reply.

"I am not so sure of that. Are you the Pierre Flaubert mentioned in this warrant?"

"I am, monsieur," a little more courteously.

"What am I to do?"

"To follow me at once—if you will be so gracious, monsieur."

"All right, Monsieur Pierre Flaubert," suavely. "I am quite at your disposal."

"Still, if monsieur would like first to communicate with his friends—or speak to the proprietor of his hotel—or—that is—"

"Humph! an accommodation, eh—and perhaps for a consideration?"

For answer, the man merely scratched his head with his grimy paw and grinned significantly.

"Ah, I shouldn't wonder," observed Magnus, sarcastically; adding, however, at once and sternly: "Lead on! You will perhaps find that I can command friends of sufficient influence, and where least expected."

Notwithstanding his curiosity, however, which he felt sure was on the point of being gratified, and speedily at that, had he known exactly what annoyances and vexations were in store for him, he would have risked knocking the agent down on the spot, and taking himself off until in readiness to investigate the affair at his leisure.

As it was, his conscience being perfectly easy, his knowledge of what it was to be an incriminated person in France was so superficial that he did not doubt a few minutes' explanation with the *juge d'instruction* (examining magistrate they would call his American prototype) would serve him free of any mistaken charge that might be brought against him.

The agent, in the first place, conducted him to the nearest police station, where the superintendent duly inspected the warrant, and then had the prisoner searched, his valuables taken from him, and then locked him up in a cell.

"Not very agreeable as a starter," commented Magnus to himself, with undiminished cheerfulness. "But patience! We shall doubtless soon reach the bottom of this mystery, and then, Eureka! I suppose Bartlow must have robbed the baron of this tell-tale scarf-pin at some period in his past career, or something of the sort. But mum's the policy for me, at least for the time being. Gad! if they really want mystery, they shall have it, rather than make my mission here in Europe public property, and thus ruin my only chance of capturing my man through his relationship with King Antoine."

But, in spite of his mild protests, the impudent detective was kept in the station cell during the entire night, though he did manage to obtain some sleep, such as it was, and was permitted to have a pretty decent breakfast sent in to him through the medium of the doorman and a liberal *douceur*, or "sweetener."

At nine in the morning he was taken out and rather summarily hustled into the "Saint-basket" as the Parisians call their ominous official equipage whose counterpart in New York is styled immemorially the "Black Maria," altogether irrespective of the color, usually a sepulchral white, it may chance to be painted.

He was then conveyed to the depot lock-up, and reincarcerated, and all this time without a syllable of explanation being vouchsafed him.

However, the experience still remained a novelty, though rapidly growing a good deal of a bore.

By French law, every person arrested on suspicion is entitled to an official examination within twenty-four hours.

At last, after a wearisome and unsavory detention, the captive was taken before the *juge d'instruction*.

"At last!" he sighed to himself, after drawing a long breath of relief. "Now we shall see what we shall see, or at least let us hope so."

CHAPTER XXXI.

FRENCH JUSTICE.

BUT in this, as in the previous speculations of our detective friend since the inception of this mysterious affair, hope was found to have told but a flattering and deceptive tale.

The examining magistrate was a self-important, sharp-nosed little man, but intelligent in his restricted sphere, and his clerk, who was alone present with the prisoner and himself in the course of the investigation, looked much like a dry chip off the same hard-wood block.

After the magistrate had asked and had his clerk take down the prisoner's name, age and profession (receiving the mention of the latter with a stare of incredulity, he impressively produced from a small drawer in the table behind which he was sitting, the inevitable scarf-pin.

"You recognize this trinket?" he demanded, with a severe air.

"Certainly, Monsieur Judge," was the bland reply. "It is the scarf-pin that was taken from me, along with my other belongings, at the police station last night."

"Can you tell me when and how this pin came into your possession?"

"Yes, I can," rejoined the prisoner, most respectfully, "but I shall have to decline to do so."

"Eh, what!" with a suspicious, half-exultant look. "And why not, pray?"

"To do so might be to defeat the ends of a very important detective commission upon which I am at present engaged."

A stare of yet more pronounced incredulity,

accompanied by a shrug and a grimace little short of insulting.

"You are not the first," continued the judge, contemptuously, "to make pretensions of this character, as an excuse for such reticence as best suits one's ideas of convenience or safety."

"I make no pretensions, but speak the truth!" exclaimed the entrapped detective, indignantly. "Here are my credentials," and he produced his chief's official certificate of his professional standing, which, having been secured in a secret inside pocket, had escaped the search to which he had been subjected at the police station. "If you can't read the language in which it is written, I cheerfully tender my services as translator. And perhaps the signature affixed to it is of sufficiently world-wide reputation to have penetrated even to the cognizance of a French *juge d'instruction*. If you still suspect me of pretensions, Monsieur Judge," scornfully, "suppose you request the attendance here of your prefect of the police. I have the honor of his personal acquaintance, and he has already examined these credentials of mine, to his entire satisfaction."

The magistrate had at first colored and frowned at the prisoner's independent words, which were doubtless wholly unexpected, but they were not without a certain effect as they proceeded.

He glanced over the paper, raising his eyebrows as he examined the signature, and then preemptonily returned the document.

"Your statements might be investigated later on," he said, abruptly, though with an additional considerateness in his tone that was slight, but unmistakable. The prime failing with your typical French examining magistrate, who may be a very earnest and worthy official according to his lights, is his exaggerated sense of self-importance, which is as prone as not to mislead him into fancying himself a Peter the Great, or Shab of Persia, as anything else apart from his true and not particularly exalted function—a misconception perhaps more laughable than pernicious in the main, but still not without its embarrassing consequences on occasion. "At present, it is merely my duty, monsieur," loftily, "to subject you to such inquisition as comes within the province of my office. You can, of course, answer or evade my questions at your pleasure—and," with a significant smile, "at your own risk."

"I shall evade nothing, Monsieur Judge," replied Magnus, with quiet dignity, "but merely maintain such rights of reservation as I think belong to me. Proceed, sir, when you please."

"You refuse to tell me how this ornament came into your possession?"

"I will say this much. I found it."

"Ah! perhaps you picked it up on the sidewalk?" with a touch of irony.

"And perhaps I did not."

"And how long since you found it?"

"Not quite seven months."

"Where?"

"In America; or, to be more particular, in a suburban town of New York."

"Can't you afford to particularize a little less generally?"

"No, sir."

"Not longer ago than seven months?"

"Not quite so long."

"Are you accustomed to wearing this jewel, monsieur?"

"Quite the contrary. I never wore it in my life before yesterday."

"Ah! and how came you to wear it then, if you please, monsieur?" still with irony, slight, but perhaps meant to be irritating.

"I can hardly say, Monsieur Judge," calmly.

"My assuming it was a pure accident, or piece of thoughtlessness." The detective recounted the bare circumstance of the toilette preceding his journey under which he had put on the pin, and then added, reflectively: "Or perchance it was a fatality, were one disposed to believe in such a thing."

"A fatality?" echoed the magistrate, catching at the word.

"That is what I said, monsieur."

"Will you explain?"

"Unfortunately I am unable to do so without trespassing upon the reservation that I mentioned as having determined to maintain."

"Ah, indeed!" And, turning to his clerk, he added, with unmistakable impatience: "Have you written down all this—mystification, chicanery, or what-not?"

The detective bit his lip, but kept his temper thoroughly in hand.

"All is down, Monsieur Judge," replied the clerk, with becoming servility. "Everything."

"I will say this much, though," continued Magnus. "All that morning I was more or less out of sorts—filled with a vague, unaccountable premonition or foreshadowing of something unusual preparing to happen to me. It was while thus preoccupied that my chance selection must have fallen upon this scarf and pin from among the accumulation of such articles connected with my wardrobe."

"The scarf too, eh?" with a keen glance at the prisoner's neckwear.

"Yes."

"Found that likewise, I suppose?"

"Precisely—along with the pin. They were never separated, to the best of my knowledge, until last night at the police station."

"Ah! so you are something of a mystic, it would seem, monsieur?"

"Nothing of the sort, monsieur," smilingly; "though it might seem so to certain intelligences."

The magistrate was evidently growing somewhat bearish—or, at all events, feeling more or less badgered, though he contented himself with glaring resentfully at his poor devil of a clerk, who merely cowered, while scratching his head with an ink-stained forefinger, as if apprehensive of a causeless explosion at almost any moment.

"A man of premonitions, then—of forewarnings?" continued the judge, eying the prisoner with growing discontent.

"That is better," replied Magnus, still smiling. "Yes, monsieur; and you might safely add, a singularly organized man—a magnetic man. In fact, Monsieur Judge," with charming unpretentiousness, "I am rather a peculiar fellow, if I say so myself."

Monsieur Le Juge d'Instruction frowned quite blackly, while the little clerk looked up with an awed expression.

What was this but audacity—positive audacity? And audacity to a *juge d'instruction*—the autocrat of that miniature star-chamber of one of Paris's strongest prisons, whose smile or frown was so portentous of hope or despair, as the case might be! A monstrosity apparently quite unheard of before.

"By the way, Monsieur Judge," continued the prisoner, with a courtesy that was now irresistible, "suppose you allow me to touch your hand?" extending his own most persuasively. "Just a moment—no trick is intended, on my honor! Thank you!"

Almost without intending it, the magistrate placed his hand into the attractively white and delicate palm that was extended to him so engagingly, and which softly but suddenly closed upon it.

Then he abruptly stiffened up, as if perforated from neck to pelvis joint by an invisible ramrod, his wizened face contorted, his fishy eyes bulging, his thin hair bristling and quivering out electrically, his hand and arm endeavoring to withdraw from the magic clutch, but in vain—a picture of fuming wrath and perhaps terror, frozen into white speechlessness at a petrifying touch.

Here the little clerk uttered a gasping little exclamation, and, springing half out of his chair, valiantly grasped a heavy ferule, doubtless with the magnanimous intention of rushing to his chief's assistance.

But the still imperturbable "prisoner" merely glanced carelessly to one side with a wave of his disengaged hand, and the doughty subordinate was equally *hors du combat*, or helpless, with his formidable superior.

Then the detective considerably snapped the spell, and judge and clerk fell back in their seats breathless and amazed.

However, their excitement had disappeared, apparently giving way to a gentle and even agreeable lassitude.

An urbane look of mingled wonder and content stole into the great little man's face notwithstanding an obvious but unsuccessful attempt to regain his iron-like dignity and assertiveness; while little Master Scrivener lazily scratched his poll, with a far-away, lotus-eating look in his small eyes, as if absolutely indifferent whether school kept or not for a thousand years to come.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SMALL LION UNEXPECTEDLY BEARDED IN HIS VERY SMALL DEN.

"Ah, this is well!" softly smiled and observed the detective—you would almost have said cooingly, both smile and speech, while equally articulate, were so harmonious and velvety. "This agreeable after-effect cannot always be counted on. But you both happen to be specially 'subjective,' as we call it, do you see? I really hope, Monsieur Judge, you will vouchsafe to pardon the little liberty I ventured to take?"

"Monsieur Judge" here managed to bridle up a bit, apparently with a great effort of the will, the frown impotently regathering on his judicial face, his lips compressing, or half-compressing, themselves as if for a fulmination.

But in vain; he sunk dreamily, if reluctantly, back, the desirous thunder dying away inaudibly amid the vacuous nebula of his returning inertia.

"Don't attempt anything ill-natured, I beseech!" murmured the detective, with a yet pleasanter smile. "It would be doing violence to your truer self—as you are just now—believe me that it would, my dear sir. There is one thing, moreover, that I can assert, which is greatly to your credit—a discovery I made at the instant of touching your hand. You are a perfectly honest and well-meaning man—so far as your (pardon! no offense intended whatever!) self-sufficiency will permit you to be."

"No thanks expected," complacently. "But

now permit me to show how honest and forbearing I can be in abstaining from taking advantage of the present state of affairs."

"You were about to summon a gendarme, perhaps? Ah, well, do so. I permit it—nay, more, *will* it. And furthermore I would suggest that you direct him when he shall come in answer to your august summons, to expedite the appearance of my accuser in this tangled affair, whom I presume to be none other than a certain elderly nobleman, the Baron de Boisgmont. There is the bell at your elbow, Monsieur Judge. Now, then!"

Monsieur Judge straightened himself up, this time indubitably, and apparently his thorough, frowning, magisterial self again, and struck the bell a resounding clang.

A policeman came hurrying into the den by one of the little doors communicating with the adjacent prison, and looked at the magistrate inquiringly, as if half expecting a command to lead the prisoner out to execution on the spot.

But, apparently even to his own self-amazement, the judge returned the inquiring look somewhat wonderingly.

"Why are you here, officer?" he demanded.

"Ahem!" growled the astounded gendarme, while the clerk, also by this time quite himself again, looked up surprised; "your Honor just rung for me."

The magistrate reddened, and then looked oddly at his hand, which, in fact, was still resting on the bell.

"So, I did!" he said, now in the most natural tone in the world. "Mr. Officer, you will see if the Baron de Boisgmont is in attendance, and report to me accordingly."

The gendarme saluted and disappeared.

He speedily reappeared, looking puzzled, and to say that not only was the baron not in attendance, but that neither was he expected to be.

"True," and the magistrate dismissed him again with a gesture. He then turned to the detective-prisoner again, altogether rehabilitated, as you might say, or thoroughly repossessed of his original character, though not without a lingering under-trace of bewilderment, saying brusquely, just as if nothing extraordinary had interrupted the examination: "Of course, the baron can't be expected to be in attendance at this stage of the proceedings. We manage these things very systematically in France, monsieur, and perhaps somewhat differently from the course pursued in America."

"I should say you did," observed Magnus, sarcastically. "However, I am perfectly willing to live and learn. In fact, otherwise I should not be here at all."

"How, monsieur?" in surprise.

"Why, look here, Monsieur Judge," said Magnus, impatiently; "do you suppose I couldn't explain about that scarf-pin to your thorough satisfaction if I wanted to?"

"I am not here to suppose, but to obtain the truth, if possible," replied the magistrate, severely. "But if you can explain about it, why don't you do so?"

"I have already answered that by so doing I might defeat another important and personal commission that I am intrusted with. Furthermore, I may be willing to test the preliminary working of your criminal laws for my official satisfaction."

"Ah!" grimly. "Let monsieur either be perfectly frank in this matter, or he may carry his test a little further than he foresees."

"Likely enough. However, you are doubtless not so speedily oblivious of a certain demonstration of my power, as I may term it, but a few minutes ago?"

The judge looked troubled, while his clerk began to cower down over his notes with a frightened look, but he stood by his resumed dignity heroically, for all that.

"Monsieur proclaimed himself an honest man—a man of principle?" he said, half-interrogatively.

"Not idly," was the reply. "I am all that, I trust."

"In that case," earnestly, "monsieur will not seek to escape—to improve his position, at the expense of an honest *juge d'instruction*, solely interested in the performance of his duty, and by the employment of occult or mysterious, not to say illegitimate and terrifying means."

The detective's face at once cleared.

"Well spoken!" he said, with a resumption of his calmness. "I shall do nothing more than prefer a reasonable request later on. Proceed, if you please, Monsieur Judge."

"Eh, well, monsieur," continued the magistrate, apparently much relieved, "to proceed, then. Perhaps you can tell me how and when you came into possession of this book?"

He produced, as he spoke, and laid alongside the scarf-pin, a small, ancient-looking book.

Magnus perceived it thus forthcoming in unfeigned surprise. It was an old French work, "A History of Notable Crimes, and their Detection," which had taken his fancy years before, on the occasion of his first visit abroad, and which he had bought from a book-stall in the old cathedral city of Aix-la-Chapelle, in Rhenish Prussia.

He replied to that effect, briefly, without

troubling himself as to how it was now so unexpectedly in his inquisitor's possession.

"Was this about five years ago?" demanded the magistrate, a new keenness in his searching gaze.

"Just about," replied the detective, with fresh surprise. "Five years and something like two months ago," he added, after reflection.

"Where were you sojourning while in Aix-la-Chapelle?" was the next question!

"At a French house of entertainment, the Hotel des Vosges."

"For long?"

"No, only transiently. Scarcely more than a couple of days, if I remember correctly."

"Monsieur seems to have a rather exact memory."

"I rather pride myself on that."

"You quitted Aix-la-Chapelle for what destination?"

"For Paris direct; I was winding up my German tour."

"You had come to Aix-la-Chapelle from—where?"

"From the picturesque little mountain resort of St. V—"

"Where you had stopped over just one night at—"

"Monsieur Judge is very well informed, it would seem. Yes, over just one night at the quaint little old auberge, or tavern, the Hotel des Etrangères."

The magistrate's eyes glistened.

"By the way," he next said, with startling abruptness, "what has become of Jacques Malines?"

The detective looked at him wholly unmoved. "Jacques Malines?" he repeated.

"Yes," sharply.

"I never heard the name before."

"Think again!" almost sneeringly. "Jacques Malines—the man who was in the quaint little old Hotel des Etrangères the same night that you were, and who is suspected to be your—your accomplice, to say the least."

"My accomplice in what?"

"In the murder that was committed there!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A SERIOUS ENTANGLEMENT.

MAGNUS gave a slight start, as was quite natural under the circumstances, and then smiled composedly.

"At last we are getting at something, at all events," said he. "But do you really think, Monsieur Judge, that if I had murdered a man for robbery—for such is the inference—that I would be so idiotic as to carry about on my person, and in full prominence, the very damning evidence against myself?"

"The crime is no new one, and you might have forgotten some of its details."

"And yet you have just complimented me on the exactness of my memory, Monsieur Judge," smiling.

"Eh, well, we forget nothing here. By the way," again abruptly, "the person murdered was—?"

"Suppose you inform me as to who he or she was. Perhaps the name may be more familiar to me—though I doubt it—than is that of your mysterious Jacques Malines."

"It was," impressively, "the Marquis de Boisgmont who was assassinated."

"Oho! Another stray sunbeam? Perhaps, some relative of the worthy baron of the same name, to whose pigheadedness or officiousness (little difference which) I am doubtless indebted for my present mystifying predicament."

"His brother—an elder brother."

"The poor baron! No wonder he is keen upon the scent. But look you, Monsieur Judge, I know nothing of this murder—never heard of it until now. As nearly as I can recall my passing sojourn at St. V—, I slept peacefully all that night at the quaint little old Hotel for Strangers, leaving for Aix-la-Chapelle at shortly after daybreak the following morning. I am a respectable man, and in a reputable profession, as I think my credentials should have proved to you."

"Your statements will be duly tested," continued the magistrate. "Meanwhile I will let you understand the position in which you find yourself."

"If you persist in treating it with indifference, that is your affair, though I warn you that it is a most grave and serious one."

"On the 12th of February, 18—, five years and more ago, the Marquis Philippe de Boisgmont, a somewhat eccentric old nobleman of antiquarian tastes, put up at the Hotel des Etrangères, in St. V—. Not the least of his eccentricities was an unwise habit of carrying with him pretty much all the money at his disposal. As he was a wealthy man, this was usually a very considerable sum. As he was a great collector of curios and antiquarian treasures of all sorts, he doubtless made it a practice of carrying the large sums of money with him for the purpose of being able to close a bargain on the spot for any article that might strike his fancy in the course of his wanderings."

"On the day following the marquis's arrival, a man calling himself Jacques Malines—the surname was thought singular, as being the same

as that of Malines, or Mechlin, a city of Belgium—came to the hotel and was assigned to a room at the top of the house. On the 14th you came, and, after inspecting various accommodations, requested to be assigned to the room immediately adjoining the one occupied by the Marquis de Boisgmont. You declined eating any supper, and retired at an unusually early hour.

"The next morning you quitted the hotel hurriedly before it was broad day, at five o'clock, having taken the precaution to pay your bill in advance."

The detective nodded.

"At eight o'clock," continued the magistrate, "Jacques Malines came down to his breakfast, disposed of it, paid his bill, and went off, knapsack on back. He had given himself out, by the way, as an athlete on a pedestrian tour.

"Two or three hours later, a housemaid went to awake Monsieur the Marquis, who never rose until late, but found herself unable to do so. The door was locked, but without the key being on the inside. After a brief delay, the woman raised an alarm. The door was broken down, and the poor old gentleman found dead in his bed, his throat cut from ear to ear, his valise rifled of its valuables—money, curios, everything."

"Suspicion at once attached itself to the man Malines and yourself. Search by the Prussian authorities was made, but in vain. The murdered gentleman having been a Frenchman of both note and influence, and his relatives making a great stir in the matter, our authorities also took it up, but with no better success. The affair was at last reluctantly pigeon-holed and temporarily forgotten."

"Finally, however, and by the merest chance yesterday afternoon, the brother of the victim, Monsieur the Baron de Boisgmont, recognized the pin in your bosom-scarf. He at once suspected you to be the long-missing American of five years ago, followed you as you loitered homeward through the boulevards, and finally locating you at the Cafe Anglais, where, fortunately for us, you lingered long over your dinner and the periodicals."

"The baron had lost no time in informing me of the circumstances. Even before you were placed under arrest your hotel had been searched, your valet warned to keep his mouth shut, and this book, bearing the trade-mark of the Aix-la-Chapelle dealer, found in your possession. That city is within easy communication with St. V—, the scene of the crime. By the way, how long did you remain in Paris after coming here from Aix?"

"Only three or four days, my circumstances being straitened, as my last remaining letter of credit could only be cashed in London. In fact, I found myself unexpectedly strapped, so that I lost very little time in getting over the Channel."

"Ah! and how did you obtain money to get out of Paris and over to London?"

"I pawned my watch. It is the one I am wearing now, or was wearing until relieved of it at the police station, together with other valuables."

"Ah! you pawned your watch?"

"Yes, yes!" a little wearily. "The Mont-de-Piete let me have three hundred francs on it, and I sent for its redemption several weeks later. My hotel bill amounted to about a hundred francs, my fare to London forty or fifty more. Anything else?"

"A very little more, monsieur. At what date did you pawn your timepiece?"

"Four or five days after quitting Aix—say, the 18th or 19th of February."

"You persist in denying all complicity in this crime?"

"Most assuredly."

"That will do, then, for the present. Only I would advise you to reconsider, in the mean time, your reticence with regard to this pin. *A demain!*"—until to-morrow. The last words to a turnkey, or other prison official, who, in response to a touch of the bell, had suddenly presented himself significantly at the prisoner's elbow.

"Look here, Monsieur Judge!" exclaimed Magnus, with an unmistakable reminder of his recent exhibition of occult power in his voice, look and manner; "am I to understand that I am remanded till to-morrow?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"All right, then!" with a smile; "I choose to submit. But I shall request that my valet, Achille Mourier, be sent for to communicate with me in private, without delay. On reflection, I forego my determination to communicate with Monsieur the Prefect of Police, but my valet I must see on personal matters at once."

The magistrate hesitated, but retained still a very wholesome recollection of the touch test.

"It is against the rules of Mazas," he said, knitting his brows. "But, as a special privilege, I will manage it for you, monsieur. The man shall be sent for promptly."

The detective had given a start.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Is this the Mazas prison?" He had not taken the trouble to think of the place of his incarceration up to this point.

"It is."

"Thanks for your courtesy, Monsieur Judge. I am then quite ready."

But, as he was about to accompany the jailer, Magnus came to a pause.

"One question, if you will permit it, Monsieur Judge."

"Yes."

"You have doubtless had a personal description of this man Jacques Malines?"

"Yes."

"What was he like, if you please?"

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders incredulously, but applied himself to a memorandum before him.

"A man of splendid, even herculean proportions; a pronounced blonde, with much florid color, and perhaps thirty-four or -five years of age; though in all probability more or less disguised."

Magnus's eyes glistened, and he smiled even more than contentedly.

"Mazas Prison—King Antoine already confined here—my man King Antoine's brother-in-law!" he said to himself. "Come, now! my forewarning is developing most decidedly."

He then nodded his acquiescence to the guard, bowed politely to the *juge d'instruction*, and was forthwith led back into the prison.

The judge kept his promise.

Achille Mourier visited his master in the latter's cell in less than an hour.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN MAZAS PRISON.

"BUT what luck for you, monsieur, to be here in Mazas?" was the valet's first exclamation.

"Of course I was mortally terrified at first when the agent put in his appearance at your rooms. Then I saw it all—how you must have purposely contrived the arrest, to be in Monsieur Antoine's close proximity without exciting his suspicions—and of course there was nothing for it but to await your message. Ah! a clever trick, my master."

"You mistake," replied Magnus, by no means ill-pleased, however, at the fellow's enthusiasm. "It was not contrived by me—quite the contrary—but an accident, or perhaps a fatality, and a most fortunate one at that. But first tell me if Miss Maycourt is very anxious about me."

"No, monsieur; but I have taken the responsibility of explaining your situation to her. The others merely think that you are absent indefinitely on an unexpected journey. Ah, the admirable young lady! Knowing now, as I do, that you have purposely contrived this scrape for yourself, she is content to know that you will step out of it in your own good time."

"Humph! this is well," said the detective, at once seeing the advantage of maintaining this erroneous and cheerful conception of his quondam so far as Ada's peace of mind was concerned. "Be sure to support her in this impression, Achille; and by all means let her abstain from any attempt to visit me here, and from communicating what she knows to the rest of our party."

"Your wishes shall be followed to the letter, my dear master."

"I am finding you to be a worthy fellow, Achille. What, then! you deem me really fortunate in managing my incarceration in this place?"

"Do I?—Wait, and listen!" And, lowering his voice, Achille inclined his ear, while holding up his finger.

They were conversing in the roomy cell to which Magnus had been consigned, probably as a preliminary to granting him at stated hours the exercising privileges of the adjoining corridor, as being still a prisoner on mere suspicion to whom a certain degree of leniency might be permitted.

It was, moreover, a secluded quarter of the prison, and until the arrival of Achille a stillness, more or less profound, had reigned around.

But now footsteps were heard, as if of some one measuring off monotonous pacings not far away.

"Hark!" whispered the valet, signing his master to the small grated wicket in the cell door, through which a considerable stretch of the corridor was visible. "Listen, monsieur!" and his face and manner expressed the utmost interest.

"What is it?"

"His highness's cell cannot be far away."

"His highness?" repeated the detective, forgetting for the moment.

"Yes, yes, monsieur—Monsieur Antoine! And that is his step—I would recognize it among a thousand. Ah, the quiet, the self-contained, the aristocratic step! Patience, without showing yourself, and you may catch a glimpse of him presently. Of course, it would never do for him to see me here with you."

"Of course, not!" And Magnus, now equally interested, drew near the wicket and waited.

In a few minutes the solitary stroller had extended his abstracted walk so far that they could catch occasional glimpses of him.

Magnus smiled contentedly.

Opportunities for a presentation had not offered themselves on occasion of his previous

visits to the gay capital—for the first time a view of King Antoine, the autocrat of the pickpockets, ravished his critical gaze.

He drew back from the wicket, as Achille touched his shoulder warningly.

After that, their conversation was resumed in guarded tones, while the monotonous sounds of the pacing footsteps went over the stone pavement of the long secluded corridor.

"I should really like to converse with the great man," said Magnus, smilingly. "But, of course, that is out of the question."

"Indeed, yes, my master!" observed the prudent Mourier, "especially as you are not in any sort of disguise."

"I shall merely watch for the chance of overhearing some interview between him and a fresh messenger from my man."

"That is it. You will presently likewise have the freedom of the corridor, your door remaining unlocked during the interim. Thus you may set it partly ajar, the better to observe while waiting."

"But if such an interview should take place inside of his majesty's cell?"

"Let monsieur make his mind easy. I have enjoyed the hospitalities of Magnus before, if monsieur has not. Such a privilege as is now accorded to monsieur—of seeing a visitor in his cell, without authorized witnesses—will scarcely be extended to Monsieur Antoine, for all his distinction. The deuce! he may thank his stars for merely being transferred hither from the Salpetriere."

"Good, then! I shall possess my soul with such patience as the fates may send."

After receiving a last message for Ada, together with certain other instructions, Achille then took his departure, choosing his time to slip away unobserved when King Antoine had temporarily disappeared from his solitary promenade.

Then, the necessary expense having been previously arranged with the prison authorities, an excellent lunch was brought to Magnus, including a bottle of choice Sauterne, from a neighboring *cafe*.

The attendant left the door unlocked, while arranging the dishes on a little table—for the cell was not without certain luxuries in the way of furniture—and then, while the captive began leisurely to enjoy his repast, he said, respectfully:

"Monsieur will have the privilege of the corridor while here. The door will remain unfastened while the hours of daylight last."

"Humph! Much obliged, I am sure," replied the detective. "Ah!" noticing a second hamper, apparently containing even a more elaborate luncheon than he himself had under discussion, "some one else is evidently no less intent than I on making the best of his enforced seclusion from the vulgar herd. Eh, friend?"

A "tip," and perhaps many a one, was in prospect, and the man was consequently in the best of humors.

"Indeed, yes, monsieur!" he replied, smiling. "One is not necessarily starved in Mazas—provided he has money."

"Eh, I should say not! But yonder collation might be meant for a coquette or a king?"

"A king, who is sufficiently coquettish in his tastes, will enjoy it," with a laugh. "This set out is for none other than a distinguished neighbor of monsieur's—for Monsieur Antoine, the King of the Pickpockets."

"Eh? Is there such a person? You see, I am a foreigner, and but little familiar with your Paris."

"I should say so! Not to have heard of Monsieur Antoine! But I must be going, if I would escape his anger and not miss his *pourboire* ('tip'), at the same time." And with that the attendant hurried away.

The detective was destined to have his patience more sorely tried than he had anticipated.

All the remainder of that day he sedulously kept himself close and on the alert, but without avail.

Not only was there no messenger for Monsieur Antoine, but that interesting individual only made two or three reappearances in the corridor, and then but briefly; the cells being finally locked up for the night, without any further occurrence to break the dull, dragging monotony of the situation.

"What if this rascal's mysterious friend in need should have already taken the alarm?" thought Magnus while lying awake with his solitary reflections in the darkness of his prison cell. "Or perhaps the fallen monarch's relief-business is already dispatched so far as outside influence could work, which would again give Bartlow a free foot into the unknown. But no, no! Achille would not have failed to get wind of such a thing."

And, driving away his despondency with pleasanter thoughts of a lovely and tender maiden-image such as are ever the lover's consolation and encouragement, he at last forgot everything in the oblivion of slumber.

The next morning, at about the same hour as on the preceding day, he was again taken before the examining magistrate.

"You are determined, monsieur," said the

official, with increased gravity and impressiveness, if that were possible, "to persist in your reticence in regard to this scarf-pin?"

Both pin and book were again lying before him as he spoke.

"Quite so, Monsieur Judge," was the collected reply.

"Ah, that is bad for you."

"Monsieur Judge is already acquainted with my reasons," indifferently.

"Eh, well, there is this much in your favor, at all events," continued the magistrate, rather grudgingly. "Most of your statements with regard to your movements, your places of sojourn, your pawning of your watch, and the like, have been verified upon due inquiry."

He here touched his bell, and to the usher who answered the summons, gave the order to introduce the Baron de Boisgmont.

The old gentleman who had been Magnus's traveling companion two days previous, accordingly made his appearance.

He bowed very politely to the magistrate, and even honored the clerk with a condescending nod, but gave the detective what was meant for a most terrible and crushing look.

Magnus, however, smiled with charming blandness in response, and took on an air of commendable cheerfulness.

CHAPTER XXXV.

STILL IN THE TOILS.

"YOU recognize this, Monsieur Le Baron?" queried the magistrate, holding up the inevitable scarf-pin.

"I do, most assuredly," was the reply. "It is one that belonged to my lamented elder brother, the Marquis Philippe de Boisgmont."

"It has something of a history?"

"Yes. My brother brought the stone back with him from his travels in Persia, and had it thus fancifully mounted by the Ribeau Brothers in the Rue de Rivoli. I recognize it particularly because the setting, which is a very singular one, as you will perceive, was executed from a design of my own, at his request."

"Now as to this book?"

The baron gave the volume a recognizing look, without so much as taking it up for a closer examination.

"I also identify this as having belonged to my brother," he replied, not a little to the dismay of the detective, who had not counted upon the book as being interwoven with the complication, or "fatality," in any way whatever. "The Boisgmont monogram is stamped on the cover. On the fly leaf there is a dedication from the Duc d'Chevreuse to Monseigneur de Balbonnais, our ancestor, and minister of police under Louis XIII."

The magistrate glanced rather triumphantly at Magnus, who could only nod in acquiescence.

"This is quite satisfactory, monsieur. These two articles were among the contents of the valise stolen from the marquis, your brother, at the hotel in St. V— on the night he was murdered?"

"They were," continued the Baron de Boisgmont. "But, for that matter, my declaration to the police, made directly subsequent to the foul crime, must be still in existence. In that statement I mentioned the entire contents of the valise, which I was well fitted to do from having packed it for my poor brother with my own hands."

"Your declaration is in my possession; I only asked you with reference to these two articles. Now, monsieur, look at the prisoner."

The baron did so with a vengeance, as you might say.

"Do you recognize him?"

"I saw him for the first time in my life day before yesterday!"

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure."

"I shall then merely ask you to sign this paper, on which my registrar has written my questions and your answers. You can then withdraw."

The paper was accordingly signed, and then the Baron de Boisgmont departed, with a parting bow for the judge and a final crushing glance for the detective.

"Now," continued the magistrate, but with a suggestion of leniency, or at least a mitigation of severity, in his manner, "what do you think, monsieur, of the book here that was found in your possession?"

"I hardly know what to think, Monsieur Judge," was the reply. "It is a most extraordinary complication that seems to connect it with this crime. I have already told you the truth as to how I came by the book."

"Eh, well," still more pleasantly, "you can make your mind easy on that score, at least. Your statement has been verified by the book-dealer in Aix-la-Chapelle, who has been communicated with by telegraph, and who remembers to have made a bargain for it with a stranger a day or two before you purchased it from his stall."

"Ah!" and Magnus could not help showing that he felt relieved; "the stranger, then, was doubtless the Jacques Malines, whose accomplice you take me for."

The magistrate made no reply to this.

"If you would only be a little less stubborn with regard to the scarf-pin!" he said.

"Monsieur, my determination on that point is unalterable."

"But one course is left to me, then. I shall have to remand you again."

And this was accordingly done, Magnus going back to his cell, and to resume his watch upon the distinguished Monsieur Antoine.

This task he resumed with renewed interest, after satisfying himself, through a few words exchanged with the attendant who brought him his lunch, and the wheels of whose good-nature had been judiciously oiled, that his majesty had received no visitor during his absence.

But the day passed and also another night, and still the fallen monarch was alone with his darkened fortune, so far as any message from the outside world was concerned.

Magnus awoke, after an imperfect night's rest, with an impatient and half-desperate feeling which all the philosophy he could muster was not wholly sufficient to dissipate.

What was his premonition destined to leave him mockingly in the lurch at last, and all that he had so patiently, hopefully undergone to result in nothing but a practical experience of French prisons and examining magistrates?

However, Achille put in a second appearance in the middle of the forenoon, bringing with him enough news, of both a gratifying and alarming character, to enliven the detective out of his despondency, at all events.

"Take heart, my dear master!" exclaimed the faithful rogue. "A strange messenger is even now waiting in the prison office for permission to confer with Monsieur Antoine. He is being searched, besides being subjected to other tedious formalities, or I should not have been able to obtain admission before him."

"Good! good!" and Magnus rubbed his hands expectantly. "Do you think the messenger is from my mysterious fugitive?"

"I haven't a doubt of it, sir. At all events, he is a perfect stranger to me, just as Monsieur Antoine's mysterious friend's previous messengers have been."

"Splendid! Heaven grant that I am not again summoned before the magistrate while the fellow is here!" Then, observing that Achille did not seem to share his new hopefulness to the full, he added: "But what is the matter with you, my man? Are you the bearer of other and less gratifying news for me?"

"Alas, yes, monsieur!"

"Ada—Miss Maycourt—is not ill, or anything of that sort?"

"No, no, monsieur. The young lady is in her usual good health, and so is her good mamma; but the banker himself—well, he is not, monsieur; and, moreover, I fear that there is the very devil to pay."

"What is the trouble? Be brief and to the point."

"Monsieur the financier is sick—very sick—was taken very suddenly two days ago, immediately on the return from the Versailles trip—and he will have no one to nurse him but madame the grande blonde—no, not even mademoiselle his daughter. That is the trouble, my dear master."

Magnus set his teeth hard.

"That she devil doubtless showing the cloven foot in earnest at last!" he muttered.

"Alas! I fear so, monsieur."

"Slow poisoning, think you?"

"Slow or swift, I know not which," gloomily. "Monsieur the financier is suddenly feeble both in mind and body—absolutely under the siren's control—no one else of the party permitted to interfere."

"But surely there is a physician?"

"Yes, but a mere nobody, and whose face somehow seems familiar to me, though I can't place it."

"To you? Ha! might it be a former accomplice of the woman's?"

Achille struck his forehead.

"I have it!" he ejaculated. "Fool that I was to have forgotten!"

"What! the strange physician?"

"Yes; I recollect now—an old-time associate of Monsieur Antoine's, and more than once in trouble with the authorities for malpractice—a certain shady Dr. Jambert!"

"This is very serious," said the detective. "Look you, Achille, I shall have to get back with Mr. Granby and the rest without further delay. Therefore, if the examining magistrate does not give me any discharge out of this scrape to-day—if I am not with you all at the Hotel des Deux Freres for dinner this evening—you are to go to Monsieur the Prefect of Police at once and acquaint him with my situation here. You understand?"

"Yes, monsieur," bewilderedly. "But surely monsieur can step out of this sham trap of his own making at pleasure?"

"You mistake. It is not of my own making, but a most embarrassing entanglement. Speak! will you follow my instructions to the letter?"

"Yes, yes, my dear master."

"Hark! footsteps."

Achille softly ran to the wicket, and as softly returned.

"The messenger to his majesty!" he whispered. "He is come."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A SECRET OF ROYALTY.

A FEW minutes later, the official who had ushered the messenger into the corridor having departed, the latter was perceived to be in earnest conversation with the King of the Pickpockets at the further end of the gallery.

But not a breath of the conference could be overheard; for the watchers to have revealed themselves would be to sacrifice everything, and there did not seem to be the slightest chance of the whisperers shifting their position.

"What is to be done?" exclaimed Magnus, in a low voice, really at his wits' end for the time being. "The precious moments are flying like lightning, and this may be my last chance of getting on Bartlow's track."

He ground his teeth.

"Leave it to me, monsieur," suggested Achille, brightly. "I will approach Monsieur Antoine forthwith, as if likewise just admitted to have speech with him."

"A good idea!" eagerly. "But wait. If you can find out nothing, manage to divert Antoine's attention while this messenger is re-passing my cell door here on his way back."

Achille stared, and then, with these final instructions, seized his opportunity to slip out into the corridor unperceived, and to approach the whispering pair at the further end.

Magnus anxiously watched the result as well as he was able by a slantwise observation through the wicket and as much of the door as he could prudently keep ajar.

Disappointment.

King Antoine was seen to give his erst-faithful and trusted liegeman a decidedly supercilious, not to say suspicious reception, and then to sternly motion him back while continuing his conference with the messenger further along the corridor.

However, Achille was then seen to confidently brush past them, and to disappear into the last cell on that side, presumably that of Monsieur Antoine itself.

Almost immediately thereafter the messenger was dismissed, while Antoine, with a parting and significant wave of the hand, likewise vanished, following Mourier into the cell.

With a swift, comprehensive glance, Magnus took the measure of the messenger as the latter approached.

"I think he is impressionable," he muttered.

"At all events, the thing must be risked."

He accordingly threw open the door, confronted the man with a piercing but kindly look, and held out his hand engagingly.

The man was a rude, uncultivated-looking fellow, but with a cunning, secretive expression.

He paused, surprised, then suspicious, then hesitating; and it is proverbial that who hesitates is lost.

"Take my hand, friend," murmured the detective, in a low, sweet, vibrant voice, such as the fellow had doubtless never heard before. "And come in here a moment—it is well that you should."

Magnus smiled still, but no longer doubtfully, as the man yielded, and their hands met.

"A cunning villain, but my man!" was his mental comment. "He'll do."

The next instant the man was drawn unresistingly into the cell, the door closed behind him, and he was pinned staringly with his back to the wall, looking uneasy but helpless, like one suddenly dazed.

The detective touched him lightly on the forehead, and the spell was complete.

"You will answer what I ask you," he continued, purringly, "and then be absolutely secretive as to all this. Is it not so, friend?"

"Yes, yes," answered the man, with the mechanicalness of an automaton. "Oh, of course, yes!"

"From whom have you borne the message that you have just delivered to Monsieur Antoine?"

"From Herr Grossman."

"Ah! a large or a small man, this Grossman?"

"Large, very large."

"Dark or light?"

"A blonde naturally, though he makes himself as he wills."

"An evil, ugly-looking man?"

"On the contrary, a magnificently noble-looking man, when himself."

"He sent you hither from Soissons?"

"Yes, but I am not to return to him there."

"Where, then?"

"Brussels."

"Has Herr Grossman taken an alarm, then?"

"It is likely. At all events there will be no more messengers from him to Monsieur Antoine."

"Why?"

"I know not."

"But what do you suspect?"

"I fancy that this business is about finished, or nearly so, and that Monsieur Antoine will presently be free."

"How long does Herr Grossman intend to remain at Brussels?"

"I am to communicate with him at lodgings there, which he has taken for one month from yesterday."

"What is the address?"

"Rue d'Artois, No. 97."

"You are to return to him there?"

"Yes; to-morrow."

"You are Grossman's servant?"

"Not yet, but he has promised to take me into his employ if I continue to prove worthy."

"What is your own name?"

"Alphonse Gruner."

"French?"

"Swiss."

"What has been your vocation?"

"I am a thief."

"That will do, Alphonso." Again touching the man's forehead. "You will, I suggest, remain absolutely secretive."

"I will not be able to be otherwise."

A last stroke of the mesmerizing hand, and the man started out of his automaton-like state.

The detective then opened the door, saw that the coast was clear, smilingly thrust him out into the passage, and the fellow silently continued on his way to the prison office, rubbing his eyes and shaking his head.

A moment later Achille returned, slipping back into the cell, after a cautionary look behind him.

"Ah, such devil's luck, my master!" he exclaimed. "His majesty is no better than a sphinx to-day—a speechless image. I have discovered literally nothing."

"Make yourself easy, Achille," was the composed reply. "I have managed the affair. Take yourself off now, and don't forget my instructions."

"Trust in me, dear monsieur."

It was not until after the luncheon hour on this occasion, and, in view of what he had heard of Mr. Grantby's illness and Madame Renaud's suspicious conduct, the detective was growing terribly impatient, when he was again sent for to appear before the examining magistrate.

The latter received him with yet more pronounced courtesy than at parting with him on the preceding day.

"Nearly all of your statements, not verified before, have now been made satisfactory—monsieur," said the judge. "You are also found to be honorably connected. In fact, I have communicated with Monsieur the Prefect of Police with regard to you."

"I trust he has vouchsafed to give me a good character," observed the detective.

"Eh, well, yes," with a smile. "In fact, you might have sent for him in the first place and thus saved yourself much tedious embarrassment."

"So I had the honor of informing your judgeship."

"True; but then you were eager for an experience of our French mode of procedure, you will remember."

"I do not forget, Monsieur Judge. And then, by hastening my dismissal from this absurd charge, I might not have given you and your registering clerk an experience that you will also be apt to remember—with nothing but pleasure, let me hope."

The magistrate winced.

"Eh, well, with interest and curiosity, at all events," he replied, good-naturedly. "Monsieur, you are a very extraordinary man—one who might interest certain of our latter-day scientists greatly."

"Thanks, monsieur; but my profession is sufficiently exacting, as it is."

"Ah, that pin, that pin! The only remaining circumstance against you is the possession of that pin, about whose history you are so obstinately reticent."

"But without which obstinacy," smiling, "I should not have had the repeated pleasure of these judicial interviews."

"You have my thanks in turn, monsieur."

"Am I to understand that I am now free, Monsieur Judge?"

"Yes; though not as you should wish to be—without a lingering suspicion attaching to you, I regret to say."

"If only you would explain that remaining obscure point, I could declare you innocent on the spot, something which, in my judicial capacity, I am unable to do."

"Do not be angry or impatient, I beg, monsieur. You are to be set free at once in any case. But, unfortunately, it can only be under an order which is equivalent to the exasperating Scotch verdict 'Not proven.' Good-day, Monsieur Magnus."

Professionally case-hardened in such matters, Magnus cared little at first for the nature of the formula that released him permanently from the entanglement.

But, meeting his friend, the prefect of police, on his way out of the prison, he received information that was more or less disquieting in this regard.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MADAME RENAUD'S BOLD GAME.

"You should have sent for me at once, my

dear Magnus," said the prefect, with much gravity, when the detective had given him in outline a history of his recent perplexity, together with the true story of the scarf-pin, the latter under pledge of secrecy. "Such entanglements are always dangerous, even for the most sophisticated of us."

"Dangerous?" echoed the detective, incredulously.

"Yes—to one's reputation, especially. What you enjoin me to secrecy upon a matter that is already in every mouth?"

"Are you in earnest?"

"I should say so! Could you hope to keep such a choice bit of mystification from the knowledge of our vampires of the press?"

"Ah! that mischief is already done, then?"

Magnus then learned that his entire connection with the affair had been ventilated far and wide. The local press had pounced upon it as a most precious morsels of sensation. The indefatigable American and English newspaper correspondents had been the first to get hold of the story, and had done more to keep it alive, in every garbled and extravagant form, than even the local Paris periodicals, which are less tenacious of a novelty in their craving for a fresh one with which to replace it. The most sensational reports had been printed, and there was even a probability of the appearance of a portrait of Magnus, the great *suspect* of the hour, in the London and New York illustrated journals at an early date. The fact of his having been at the St. V— Hotel on the night of the murder, and of the scarf-pin and book having been found in his possession, had been already put into such prominence that in all probability hardly a doubt existed as to his criminal complicity in the mind of any American or English reader, apart from the narrow circle of his personal acquaintance. Some "specials" had even gone so far as to hint that he had confessed, while one had even asserted that self-destruction had been attempted.

"Well, I suppose I shall have to stand it," Magnus at last philosophized, when the worst had been told.

It then occurred to him to mention to the prefect the complication that had arisen among his traveling party during his absence, and the official at once became doubly interested.

"Deal with the woman on the spot, and as you see fit," he said, promptly. "Two policemen will be in waiting, with instructions to obey your suggestions unquestioningly. Am I not equally interested in the case now with yourself, since there can hardly be a doubt that your fugitive bank-robber can be none other than our long-missing Jacques Malines? Ha! and as for this majestic housekeeper, the stately Renaud, together with her little Doctor Jambert—eh, well, who would have thought of our police gill-sine scooping them in, too?"

"What you can place them, also, in your retrospect:

"Can I? There is no doubt, from what you tell me, that the adventuress is Monsieur Antoine's sister, who, as *La Grande Celeste Fleurie* (the grand and florid Celeste), "made such a brief and unenviable boulevard sensation ten or a dozen years ago, though as for the husband, the London adventurer, Armsdale, he must have kept very quiet, for I have no recollection of him at present. But the little Jambert! Ha, ha, ha! But go on, my friend. You are in the swim of the thing at last, I haven't a doubt, and nothing shall interfere with your individual measures in the premises. Wouldn't I have given something to see Monsieur the Examining Magistrate and his little servante in the hypnotic-toils of *Le Detective Americain de la Touche?*" (the American Touch Detective).

"Yes, the good judge could not abstain from letting me into the joke, even though it was against himself."

And, with a parting shake of the hand, the good-natured prefect permitted his American friend to go on his way.

Much to the detective's satisfaction, Ada Maycourt's individual manner of greeting him at the hotel, where he arrived late in the afternoon, was to rush impulsively into his arms.

"Ah, we have been so unhappy!" she half-sobbed. "But now that you are back once more, my darling, all will soon be well again with us, I know it will."

He kissed and fondled her most tenderly.

"What, my beloved!" he murmured; "you could read all those preposterous newspaper accounts, and still not lose faith in me?"

"Hush!" closing his mouth with a kiss from her lovely lips. "As if anything could make me lose faith in you!"

He had already conferred again with Achille, who had represented the mystery or trouble on the old banker's account as being at a decidedly critical stage.

Mr. Grantby's party was occupying the best suite of rooms in the hotel, comprising an entire floor.

On entering the front drawing-room of the suite with Ada, the latter's mother, Grace Grantby and Randall Maycourt were found assembled there, in a very gruesome state of mind, notwithstanding that they greeted the detective most cordially, Mrs. Maycourt even kissing him,

and her son grasping his hand with earnest warmth.

The cause of their despondency would have been quickly apparent, even if Magnus had not been apprised of it beforehand.

By the open door communicating with the private corridor connecting the different rooms of the suite, a hired nurse could be seen occasionally passing to and fro between the head of a staircase and the chief bedroom, which was the third apartment back, and a general air of mystery, gloom and dread seemed to pervade the place.

Magnus at once, however, infused his personal energy and alertness into the dolorous group.

"Consider me in absolute command here forthwith," said he, crossing the floor and closing the passage door. "Randall, oblige me by calling in Achille, who is doubtless near at hand."

This was done, after which the valet was sent off again temporarily, with certain whispered instructions.

"How is the patient by this time?" then queried the detective, addressing himself to all present.

"More feeble and unreasonable than ever," Randall took it upon himself to reply. "Doctor Jambert says that there is but little hope."

"Delirious?"

"No, but so fretful and excitable, the hired nurse says, as to amount to the same thing."

"Who is with the patient now?"

"His dear Madame Renaud, as a matter of course!" It was Grace Grantby who responded this time, her eyes blazing and her lips quivering.

"Now let me understand the situation from the start," the detective continued. "As I am told, Mr. Grantby was first taken down with this extraordinary seizure three mornings ago, on his return with the rest of you from the Versailles jaunt. Mrs. Maycourt, let me request you to answer, as being perhaps more composed than some others."

"You have been informed correctly in substance, Carolus," replied the lady thus particularized. "But Mr. Grantby had begun to manifest a transformation on the train, a considerable time before we reached the hotel. We are quite sure now that Madame Renaud must have managed to give him a first disturbing potion of some sort even before we quitted Versailles."

"Ah, a bold game, a bold game! And—pardon me, all of you, but I can scarcely credit it—you at once permitted him to pass exclusively under the woman's control without protest."

"You should have seen how Mr. Grantby acted," Randall made haste to interpose. "It was not only that he seemed suddenly bewitched in both mind and body, but he acted like a veritable madman. The woman herself was hypocritically passive enough—that is, at the outset."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN A SIREN'S CLUTCH.

BEFORE the detective could speak again Grace Grantby once more broke out passionately, saying:

"Perhaps you haven't heard, Mr. Magnus, that papa first made his will, before being taken down, and rendered comparatively helpless?"

Magnus looked up in astonishment.

"Made his will?" he repeated.

"Yes," continued Miss Grantby, controlling her excitement to the best of her ability, "with the assistance of a legal adviser—had it regularly drawn up, signed and witnessed, though none of his own party, with the single exception of Madame Renaud," with venomous significance, pardonable enough under the circumstances, "was allowed to be present."

"But Achille intimated nothing of this sort to me," said Magnus.

"We took care not to let him know of it. It was sufficiently disgraceful for us to keep among ourselves."

"But to what effect?"

"We are altogether uncertain whether I was quite disinherited by the new will or not," continued the young lady. "The lawyer would tell us nothing—as in professional honor bound, he said—but he looked a good deal, I can tell you. And you can draw your own conclusions, as we have been compelled to do."

"Since then," here put in Randall, "not one of us has been permitted to enter the sick-room without being subjected to a torrent of more or less violent abuse by the poor demented gentleman, whose principal delusion seems to be that we are all—with the single exception of the Renaud, as a matter of course—in a conspiracy to poison him. She has even made a pretense of quieting him—or even being shocked at his charges—but, of course, it is nothing more than pretense."

Magnus turned his eyes slowly upon Mrs. Maycourt, saying:

"And you, ma'am? Can it be possible that your reception was no better than the others?"

"There has been no opportunity," replied "Madeleine," with quiet dignity, a slight color coming into her cheeks.

"It is different with mamma," interposed Ada. "Indeed, Mr. Grantby has been overheard to beg that she might be brought to visit

him; but mamma has very sensibly not chosen to be made such an unjust exception of."

"Right, right!" muttered the detective. "By the way, Doctor Jambert is not in attendance at this moment, I presume?"

"No," Randall made answer, consulting his watch, "but this is his time. He should be here within a very few minutes now."

"This man was installed in the case at Madame Renaud's suggestion, I understand?"

"And at papa's own insistence, after the initial visit," said Grace. "He seemed to be glamourised with regard to him hardly less than to her."

"A disreputable and dangerous quack! Didn't Achille give you a hint as to the fellow's true character?"

"Something more than a hint, but what could we do under the circumstances?"

"Humph!"

Here Achille slipped back into the room, giving his master a look, as much as to say, "Your wishes have been carried out, monsieur."

"Come!" said Magnus rising abruptly, and approaching the door to the private hall; "I shall probably want all of you to be present. This state of affairs has gone on about long enough."

"You surely will not intrude upon papa so abruptly?" cried Grace, running between him and the door in a sort of terror. "Mr. Magnus, it will be apt to make him positively frantic. You cannot imagine how he has raved against you especially."

"Against me, especially, eh?" calmly, and yet gently putting her to one side from his path. "Ah! the dear Renaud has doubtless, with charming inadvertence, let him devour those fluttering newspaper reports of my recent experience, I suppose?"

"Yes, yes; but you really must not, ought not to, face him now, sir. He has stigmatized you, in his ravings, as a hypocrite, a villain, a convicted murderer, one who will doubtless be guillotined—it was dreadful!"

"Follow me, all, if you please," calmly persisted the detective, opening the door. "Remember this, however," in a lowered voice, "you are none of you to manifest any surprise at whatever I may say or do. And you, Achille, do not forget to lend me your enthusiastic support and affirmation of anything that I may charge, howsoever circumstantially and to your astonishment."

Achille responded with his favorite grimace and a twinkle of his keen little eyes, that were sufficiently expressive.

Magnus then silently led the way along the passage.

The hired professional nurse, a neat-appearing but rather stolid-looking woman of middle-age, was coming out of the sick-room as they approached it.

"We can dispense with your services, ma'm," said the detective, with sudden harshness. "Be sure that you do not come back here, unless sent for by me."

Then the woman forthwith skulking away, he abruptly led the advance into the room.

A large and handsome apartment; Mr. Grantby, greatly wasted and changed, seemingly in a half-doze on the couch; a small table, covered with vials, glasses, powders and other conventional appurtenances, within convenient reach; Madame Renaud, confident, composed, all but regal, in an easy-chair by the couch, and facing the door, a French novel in her lap.

But the detective's harsh injunction to the nurse had already aroused both patient and nurse, the former looking up somewhat wildly as the procession entered, the Renaud herself on her feet in an instant, defiant and alert, her fine nostrils quivering, the battle-light in her face and eyes.

Then Mr. Grantby struggled into a sitting posture, with a sort of impotent, half-articulate howl, his haggard eyes glaring resentfully at the detective.

"You here again, Magnus?" he weakly raved. "Out of my sight, traitor, murderer, snake in the grass! What! after this public exposure of your past evil life, your past crimes, you would dare—"

But Magnus had thrust the woman violently aside, as she sought to bar his way to the side of the couch, where a few passes of his magnetic hand over the form of the unfortunate gentleman caused him to sink gradually back, after which he gazed wearily and wonderingly around upon the new faces about him, as if slowly and still bewilderedly, struggling out of a long-enduring, most unhappy dream.

"Where am I?" murmured the old gentleman. "Ah, I remember—but no, I do not. Hasn't there been a great trouble, a conspiracy?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

"PEACE, peace, my poor old friend!" said Magnus, gently. "That is what I bring you what we are all here for. A conspiracy? Yes, you are right—a conspiracy of one; and there," pointing sternly at the Renaud, "stands its incarnation in that coquettish, that foul poisoner, who would have so ruthlessly sapped you of your substance and your life! But, take heart,

my friend! Whether thus far obsessed, or slowly drugged, your deliverance from this source is at hand. I am here again with you, God be praised!"

Mr. Grantby shook his head feebly, as if at a loss to wholly understand, and then closed his eyes wearily, but only to open them again in fresh bewilderment.

But the Renaud, who had at first been somewhat taken off her guard by the suddenness and brutality of these charges hurled against her, was almost instantly magnificent in her wrath.

"Scoundrel of a detective!" she exclaimed, her voice quivering, her splendid blue eyes fairly darting fire; "how dare you thus asperse me? You, a murderer in the past, a scoundrel by nature! well, it might be expected of you."

Without heeding her words any more than if they were unheard, Magnus calmly signed to Achille, who forthwith slipped out of the room.

When he returned, which was almost immediately, Madame Renaud perceptibly changed countenance, notwithstanding her iron self-control, for the valet's return was accompanied by two policemen, who unobtrusively ranged themselves against the wall, and seemed to be unpleasantly expectant.

The banker had sunk into a sort of observant apathy, as one might think, out of which he seemed to be staring and listening in a species of struggling mystification that was both curious and pathetic to witness.

"Woman!" exclaimed the detective, in harsh, metallic tones, that caused even Ada to look up in semi-terror, they were so painfully different from any that she had ever heard him utter before, and he confronted Madame Renaud with a sudden and withering pitilessness of mien that caused her to momentarily blanch in spite of herself; "heartless adventuress! poisoner! you are near the close of your devil's game at last, and you may thank the fates if you do not find a halter at the end of it."

"Insulting scoundrel!" the adventuress speedily found nerve to retort, "do you think to affright me with these absurd charges, this cheap dramatic prearrangement?—you, fresh as you are from a felon's cell, and with a charge of midnight assassination only 'not proven' hanging over your accursed head? Ha! ha! ha!" mockingly, as she saw him give an involuntary start; "you see I can obtain speedy information of my own, on occasion."

"Doubtless from your brother, Monsieur Antoine, the King of the Pickpockets, who may by this time have likewise wriggled his way out of Mazis," coolly replied Magnus, with a shrug of indifference.

The shot told, especially as being delivered in the presence of the gendarmes, both of whom grinned interestedly.

"A brother of mine? Insulting liar!" cried the Renaud. "But, *peste!* why should I heed such absurdities, when it is well known that I have no brother, and never had?"

"Monsieur the Prefect of Police may be able to revive your memory on that point, Madame la Grande Celeste fleurie," still calmly, though with a slight smile as he saw her lose countenance again. "However, you may well have other secret correspondents, it is true, as to what is going on in the world of prisons and of crimes. There is your will-o'-the-wisp husband, for instance, Cosmo Armsdale, the all-round cosmopolitan crook, otherwise Catesby Bartlow, the whilom cashier and robber of the Mount Kerton Bank, otherwise—to go considerably further back—Jacques Malines, the robber-assassin of the Marquis Phillippe de Boisgmont!"

She had started, as was but natural enough, at the mention of Armsdale and Bartlow's names, her face slightly flushing, but at the third and most criminal implication—at which even the policemen had looked up with renewed interest and astonishment—she had manifested a fleeting but genuine wonder in her face and eyes, which raised a doubt in the detective's mind as to her theretofore knowledge of her consort's connection with the capital offense, as charged by him.

"Lies, lies, lies!" she laughed, scornfully and defiantly. "But what a fool I am to let such ridiculous abuse disturb me in the least!"

Here she broke off abruptly to turn toward the couch, upon which the invalid banker had again risen, into a sitting posture.

Could she believe her eyes?

Old Grantby himself, her heretofore worshiper, old Grantby the glamourised, the bewitched, gazing at her suspiciously, resentfully, a new light, something very like an awakening horror in his haggard, all but accusing eyes!

"Don't believe him, my love, my darling!" she almost screamed, throwing up her beautiful arms. "Lies, calumnies, falsehood! Besides, think of what I've been to you up to this moment—your beauty, your dream-bringer, your own Celeste, your—"

She made a motion to throw herself on her knees by the couch, but the detective tore her away, with a rude, all but brutal grasp that left its marks on her white wrists and rounded forearms, where the loose-falling sleeves of her luxurious gown or wrapper permitted their betrayal.

"Enough of your theatricals!" he growled, with that new and terrible harshness in eye, voice and mien. "Ay, his dream-bringer, truly, with your slow poisons and sorceress spells; but from this hour he is to awake unto his true self again. Back, woman, back, I tell you!"

Though blanched and staggered, she was glaring at him with the fury of an enraged pythoness, one hand wandering helplessly at her girdle, the other at her bosom, as if in vain search of some deadly weapon with which to spring at his throat.

"That lying charge again!" she hoarsely faltered, the breath coming and going audibly through her parted lips, her superb bust rising and falling like a fluctuant billow in its unrest. "Accursed lying detective, it is false—false as hell! I have used no poisons."

"Stop!" he had assumed a sudden calmness which was even more terrible than the harshness it replaced. "Demoness! do you think you have not been secretly watched, your most secret movements noted, even some of the wrappings and labels of your poisonous compounds preserved? Step forward here, Achille Mourier!"

CHAPTER XL.

LIKE A HOUSE OF CARDS.

His specifications, utterly random and reckless as they were, hit the mark, even as the chance or snap-shot bullet will so often pink the bull's-eye that its more elaborately aimed fellow will fly so far and wide of.

The adventuress had retreated yet another step, and was glaring at him with suddenly dilated, terror-stricken eyes.

"Lies, lies, lies!" she could only repeat, and now in a species of growing panic.

Then when the valet, Achille Mourier, stepped briskly and confidently forward, in ready support of his master's clever fictioning, even these feeble denials died away on her white lips.

"Speak, Achille Mourier!" continued Magnus, in his sternly calm, judicial tone. "You have been on the watch here more or less constantly from behind one or another of these heavy curtains and portieres?"

"Indeed, yes, my master," replied Achille. "Ah," with all but joyous mendacity, "the devil; what have I not seen, marked and noted from my secret hiding, with a growing horror curdling in my veins?" shaking his head.

"Was it four or five times that you saw this person painstakingly tamper with the sick man's draughts while he slept?"

"Six, or maybe seven!" almost in a shout—in fact, Achille Mourier, rogue that he was, was in imminent danger of overdoing the trick.

"And you have retained the wrappers and labels of some of the ingredients you thus saw suspiciously administered?"

"Not some, but all, monsieur. Even the strings that tied the packages have been religiously treasured by me."

"The chemists' shops can thus be traced where the purchases were made?"

"Not shops, my master, but shop," still criticised the valet, his delight for elaborating a fiction carrying him deeper and deeper. "But one apothecary was dealt with—that is, but one to my most certain knowledge."

Here the detective held up his hand—Mourier's support might become altogether too enthusiastic.

But enough had already been ventured, and successfully.

Madame Renaud was grasping the back of a chair for support, trembling in every limb.

A momentary hope, however, leaped into her despairing face, for at this juncture Dr. Jumbert—an owlish, professional-looking little man in black, with a feloniously shaped, partly bald little head, coming up to a sort of truncated cone at the top like a pear on end—unsuspiciously entered the room.

Noiselessly bustling and confident at first, but with a startled air, as if more than willing to retreat, when he perceived his unexpected surroundings, especially the policemen, though he quickly recovered his professional air and confident bearing for the nonce.

"Ha! here is the good physician," cried out the Renaud, rallying. "Speak out, Doctor Jambert! This injurious man is accusing me of tampering with our dear patient's medicines. Think of such a thing! But you, with your reputation and superior knowledge, will surely—"

"Arrest that man, officers!" sternly commanded the detective. "A scoundrel quack! already once arrested and prosecuted in the past for criminal malpractice, and stripped of his diploma, he is altogether unauthorized to practice. Arrest him—I make a formal charge!"

The little doctor, already thoroughly scared, would gladly have taken to his heels, but was promptly in the grip of one of the *sergeants de ville*.

Madame Renaud's plot for a name and a fortune, or for whatever else she may have had in view, was tumbling around her like a house of cards.

She threw one last desperate glance around her, catching, with a sort of gasp, a last look

from Mr. Grantby's eyes, now filled with undeniable horror and loathing.

Then, with a low, hoarse cry, her fingers locked like the talons of a bird of prey, she sprung revengefully at the detective's throat.

He laughed, evading her onslaught with a swift, gliding movement, and then, snap! a pair of handcuffs, which he had produced with a dexterous sleight-of-hand from somewhere, were upon her wrists.

Then the adventuress very becomingly fainted, and, on being brought to, sensibly submitted to her arrest, and accompanied her confederate, the little doctor with the odd-shaped little head, in the custody of the *gensd'armes*.

A few minutes later a reputable and capable physician, who had been thoughtfully sent for by Magnus at the time that he had secured the attendance of the *gensd'armes*, made his appearance.

His presence was peculiarly seasonable, for at this juncture the banker started up wildly in his bed, a pitiable picture of humiliation, remorse and returning reason.

"Great God!" he sobbed brokenly; "I have been living in a mist, a cheating dream. Oh, the witchery, the paralyzation, the hideous glamour of it all." Sinking back again, he covered his eyes and wept.

Magnus made a few soothing passes over him, and he became more composed, though still with weak tears stealing down his worn cheeks and through his fingers.

Briefly as might be, the physician was placed in possession of the facts and surmises with regard to the case, which he thereupon at once took in hand with quiet energy and dispatch.

"The gentleman is in no special danger as yet," was his subsequent verdict, after he had eliminated the paraphernalia of the little table and sent off Achille with a prescription. "Positive poisons have not been used, I fancy, though there seems to have been a systematized purpose to debilitate the patient down to the last notch in both body and mind. With my treatment and careful nursing, he should be himself again within a week."

"Madeleine! Madeleine!" weakly called out the banker, as the ladies were quitting the room; "and Grace, my daughter! Ah, pity, forgive! and do not forsake me!" And then he repeated the first name, scarcely audibly. "Madeleine! Madeleine!"

Mrs. Maycourt, very pale, had come to an irresolute pause, with Grace sympathetically at her side.

Magnus looked at her appealingly.

"A trustworthy professional nurse has been sent for, ma'm," he said, suggestively, "and should be in attendance very soon."

"Go on, then," murmured the widow, after a last hesitation. "I shall remain."

When the others were once more alone with the detective in the drawing room, they looked at him inquiringly.

"How could you have learned those particulars of Madame Renaud's tampering with the medicines?" exclaimed Randall.

"There weren't any, save what I supplied," was Magnus's smiling reply.

"What!" cried Grace; "and those proofs—the wrappers and labels—Achille's secret watch of her movements?"

The detective laughed.

"All guess-work at a venture! But, by the way, didn't the rascal support me capitally? though, to be sure, he came precious near overdoing it."

Ada clapped her hands together.

"It isn't right to applaud roguery," she said, gayly. "But I sha'n't be able to think otherwise than admiringly of your Achille hereafter."

"But there'll be no real charge on which to hold the adventuress," observed Randall.

"No, but she'll be in safe-keeping for some time to come, and I rather think that the deliverance of monsieur her brother, the King of the Pickpockets, can be conveniently delayed, till we can get fairly on the track of our fugitive bank-thief in Brussels."

"What! are we going to Brussels?" they all cried.

"I at least am, and without delay," was the reply, "and you can accompany me, if you will. Perhaps the more the merrier."

CHAPTER XLI.

AGAIN ON THE TRAIL.

MR. GRANTBY being found to be greatly improved on the following day, it was decided that the remainder of the touring party, with the exception of Mrs. Maycourt, who was willing to remain with him as his chief nurse, should accompany the Touch Detective to Brussels forthwith.

Grace Grantby would also have cheerfully remained with her father, but the old gentleman, still mortified and repentant over his recent weakness—for which, however, he was found to have been less responsible than might have been supposed—would not hear of his abridging her pleasures for his sake, though he was less chary about accepting a like sacrifice upon the part of Madeleine, the love of his early days.

But then the comely widow herself seemed to

be quietly satisfied with her self-imposed duty at last, and there was that observed between the patient and his nurse which suggested that an agreeable understanding, if nothing of a tender nature, had been undemonstratively established.

Then in the middle of the day, shortly before the start for the Belgian frontier was in order, Mr. Grantby had the entire party summoned to his bedside, for the public rendering on his part of an act of justice, or reparation, as he called it.

The nature of the act was more or less apparent when the legal gentleman who was present, at a sign, produced a folded and rather formidable-looking document, which he placed in the banker's hands.

Mr. Grantby merely glanced over its contents, somewhat wonderingly it would seem, and then, crumpling the paper impatiently, said, with an unmistakably shame-faced flush:

"My friends, I leave it to you to merely imagine the nature of the written and attested matter, which I am unable to reconsider with any degree of equanimity, much less fitly characterize as it deserves.

"Pray consider it as a last evidence of temporary insanity on my part, which I herewith destroy forever."

He held the document, as he spoke, in the flame of a lamp that was burning conveniently near, until it fell from his hand completely consumed.

Then he looked up, with the shame-flush still lingering in his worn face, as he gratefully took the hand that was extended to him by Mrs. Maycourt from where she sat at the head of the bed, saying, simply:

"Would to Heaven that the record of all one's follies and madnesses could be as easily eradicated forever! I wish you all a joyous and successful expedition. Grace, my dear, come and kiss me, if you are not ashamed of me?"

"Father, how can you speak thus, and to me, your own Grace?"

And then the noble girl was on her knees at his side, his poor face on her breast, her arms wreathed about his wasted form.

Monsieur, the lawyer, who for a wonder had abstained from saying a word, then arose, shook the invalid by the hand, and took his departure with an elaborate and smiling bow for the ladies, which seemed to offer them its congratulations quite eloquently.

Apart from those two, the banker and his lawyer, it was never exactly known what had been the contents of the paper, but there was little doubt that Madame Renaud might have had keen cause for chagrin had she been present, and that it was a last will and testament that had been thus destroyed.

The party that set out for Brussels a little later on was somewhat metamorphosed from its original composition and intent.

It seemed to be composed of the two young ladies, under the escort of Mr. Randall Maycourt, as head and front of the mild offending, if such there were; the gentleman being attended by a dapper and spry little dark-complexioned, black-haired and black-mustached Frenchman as his valet, in whose new personality few would have detected the identity of Achille Mourier, whom, nevertheless, it was in clever disguise; and the entire party being under the immediate direction of a grave, solemn and rather vapid-looking *valet du place*, or special courier, in half-livery and military cap, who would doubtless have been even more unrecognizable as our friend the Touch Detective in a new character.

Ada, especially, could with difficulty abstain from bursting out laughing at the stolid and self-conscious dignity with which her lover entered upon his new role, in the matter of looking after the luggage at the station, wrangling with the guards and porters over their charges or *pourboires* (tips,) and in other preliminaries.

"One would fancy you had been a hired courier all your life," she cried, when they were all together in one coach-compartment of the train. "How do you manage it so well—Albert?" giving him the new name that had been hit upon for traveling use.

"Ma'm'zelle is disposed to pleasantry," gravely but urbanely replied the *pseudo-courier*, in a guttural, half-German idiom which he had adopted, and which seemed peculiarly in keeping with his combined owlishness, phlegmatism and alertness. "Ve air couriers by de anzes-try in der Bawarian Albs v'ot I vas borned out of."

"Oh, indeed!" And then both Grace and Randall joined in the comicality of the occasion.

"Yes, ma'm'zelle," continued "Albert," self-complacently. "My fadder was a gourier pevore me, unt zo was my seventeen brudders. You zee, I vas der youngest off der vamily, unt, goming afder zo many oder boys, zat is vy I ain't zo pig unt sdoud as zome oder vellers, ain't it?"

"You must be very well educated," interposed Miss Grantby. "to be able to escort parties of so many different nationalities upon their travels."

"Burty goot all der dime," replied Albert, unctuously, "but nod much gombared to mein brudder. I only speak nineteen modern lang-

uages, pesides Hebrew, Arabic unt Zanscrit. He is vamiliar mit fifty-sigx."

"Why, he is away ahead of you!" laughed Ada. "Which one of your seventeen brothers is that who is so highly accomplished?"

"He is der very devil, ma'm'zelle. Howeffer, dat ain'd nuddings in bardicular for us vellers, der gouriers. Ve wouldn't pe pody-servants, like dat Vrench chap, Zhonny Grapeau yonder."

Achille pretended to be extremely indignant at this aspersion upon his nationality, and there was another explosion of laughter, in which the detective vouchsafed to join in his natural tone of voice.

"But do you really think this masquerading is necessary, Carolus?" asked Ada, when comparative quiet had been once again restored.

"Certainly, my dear girl," replied Magnus, "or I would not essay it. I am no fonder of going outside of my own character than you yourself could be."

"And yet you say," observed Randall, "that Bartlow is himself famous for the successful assumption of disguises."

"He has that reputation."

"Wouldn't such a man, then, be more apt, uncommonly keen, in fact, to see through disguise in another?"

"It doesn't follow as a matter of course, by any means," Magnus answered, thoughtfully. "Indeed, at times it would seem quite to the contrary. Jackson, the best 'character man' on our home staff, for instance, is notoriously more readily taken in by a fugitive criminal who is an adept at his own game than any detective I know of."

"That seems strange."

"It does so; but it is, nevertheless, rather frequently the case, and it would perhaps be hard to account for it. However, with regard to myself and Achille in the present case, there was literally no other course for us to pursue, with any hope of our getting track of our man. And that, too, notwithstanding the temporary caging of Madame Renaud and her medical friend, together with Monsieur Antoine still likely to remain in prison for at least a fortnight yet; which greatly lessens the chance of our movements being communicated to Bartlow in secret."

"The great Monsieur Antoine is still likely to remain in prison, you think?"

The disguised detective nodded a complacent affirmative.

At this juncture, however, the train was making its first stop at S—.

Then there was a warning "Hist!" and Magnus felt his arm seized by the disguised Achille, who was pointing through the window.

"The devil!" muttered the valet. "Look, my dear master! It is he!"

CHAPTER XLII.

THE INTERRUPTION.

ACHILLE had particularized one man—a rather sedately aristocratic-looking individual—among a number of others who had momentarily stepped off the train to stretch their legs on the station platform during the brief detention.

Magnus gave an inward groan.

"Monsieur Antoine himself, as I live!" he exclaimed, in a low voice of the bitterest disappointment. "What miserable luck! The fellow must have made his escape from Mazas, and is doubtless even now on his way to the frontier."

The young ladies and Randall had hurried to the window for a glimpse of the celebrated rogue, while Achille, more practical, had opened the door, and hopped out of the train, in order to keep track of him.

"What a really distinguished-looking man!" observed Grace, before the subject of her remark had quite disappeared from view. "And yet he looks shabby, no less than careworn."

"The cares of state, perhaps, combined with the ingratitude of the proletariat," suggested Ada, laughing. "It costs something to be a dethroned monarch, I suppose."

Here the warning cry of "All on board!" or its equivalent in French was heard, and Achille came tumbling back into the compartment just as the train began to pull out.

He nodded to Magnus with a somewhat hopeless air, and then seemed to tie himself up in a knot of conflicting and decidedly gloomy reflections as he resumed his seat.

"My dear monsieur!" he murmured; "the great man has proved too much for us. He is likewise booked for Brussels, doubtless with the express purpose of putting his brother-in-law on his guard."

Magnus knitted his brows, but did not reply at once; and now the young ladies also began to appreciate the gravity of the occasion.

"But look here, Magnus!" suddenly exclaimed Randall, his face brightening; "mayn't the rascal's interposition be turned into an advantage, after all? He is on his way to confer with Bartlow, you think?"

"There can be little doubt of it," was the reply.

"Well, if shadowed discreetly, what is to prevent his leading you and Achille right into Bartlow's place of hiding?"

The detective shook his head, while Achille

shrugged his shoulders to the same dampening effect, and yet more unmistakably.

"Thoroughbreds like Monsieur Antoine, the King of the Pickpockets, do not admit of being shadowed," replied Magnus. "Not to be thought of. Wait a minute, however."

After a few moment's reflection, his brow cleared, and he said, somewhat hopefully:

"There is but one chance of circumventing this warning which the fellow is evidently bent on conveying, and it isn't altogether a brilliant one. But it must be taken."

"What is it?" demanded Randall.

"The one thing in our favor is that Antoine seems to be strapped for the time being. He is without a dozen francs in his pocket, or my judgment is at fault."

"Good! and what then?"

"Well, Heaven grant that he doesn't have a chance to pick a pocket on the train, so as to relieve his supposed immediate necessities before we reach the Brussels station!"

"Why this fervency, my friend?"

"Because there he must pick yours, or we are lost—our best chance gone for surprising Bartlow, at all events."

Randall stared, and then, beginning to understand, he burst into a laugh.

"Ah!" he said; "the fellow must be forthwith insnared into the clutch of the authorities afresh, you mean?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I shall do my best to present the necessary temptation."

"It is a slender chance," continued Magnus, "but none other is left us, that I can see. Antoine is not used to the practical or dirty work of his profession, you understand, and he will be apt to be yet more sly and circumspect after his experience of Salpetriere and Mazas. Still, we must rely on the urgency of his present necessities, and take our chance."

"But stay!" suddenly interposed Grace, slightly paling. "Mightn't there be some danger attending such an experiment for Randall? I have heard of the desperation of criminals when unexpectedly detected in their wrong-doing—fierce accesses of murderous rage and—"

But the detective was shaking his head smilingly, while Achille, with his handkerchief stuffed in his mouth, seemed to be in a state of mingled suffocation and convulsions.

"There will be no violence, my dear young lady," said Magnus, reassuringly. "Set your mind at rest. Certain criminals are violent occasionally, I grant you, but pickpockets never, not even the person of their royalty."

"My objection to the experiment is on other grounds," observed Ada, quietly.

Her lover looked at her in surprise.

"Is it morally right to offer a temptation to crime under any circumstances?" she continued. "That is the only consideration with me."

The detective's fine eyes softened, and he began to be additionally proud of his betrothed, if that were possible; though with no intention whatever of putting her simple Christian precept into practice.

"Not morally right, most assuredly, my dear girl," he replied, gently, "save as necessity constitutes a law unto itself, which is more or less inexorable in this work-a-day and heathen world. It may not be morally right to tempt the game into the fowler's net, nor to delude the rogue to his own undoing—but the satisfaction of one's hunger and the suppression of crime must be pursued just the same."

Ada smiled a little sadly, but did not venture to urge her rather Quixotic point of morality any further.

The plan for entrapping Monsieur Antoine was very simple, and everything was prearranged long before their destination was reached, which was not until late at night.

One might have expected the faithful ex-rogue, Mourier to have declined to join in it out of a lingering sentiment of fidelity for his old-time royal chief.

But, quite the contrary on this occasion at least, he seemed to think that to play successfully such a game on his hard-up majesty—to trick the trickster—would be too good a joke to lose, and to enter into it with his accustomed cheeriness and enthusiasm accordingly.

Both his master and he had taken the precaution to draw quite apart from the rest of the party as the train was being emptied of its passengers.

The ladies were therefore escorted along the brightly-lighted platform as if in charge of young Maycourt alone, while being conducted in the direction of the cab-stand, about which there was the usual bustle and confusion.

Randall, the young women nervously waiting by his side, pulled out his well-filled wallet to pay the porter who was in charge of their trunks.

His duster was hanging over his arm, and after satisfying the porter, with a half-eye on Monsieur Antoine, who was moving about somewhat restlessly and disconsolately but a short distance away, he flurriedly put away the wallet into the tail-pocket of his cutaway coat, while offering an arm to each of his charges, and pushed forward blunderingly through the crowd.

"Hack, there, hack!" he vociferated to the mob of shouting, whip-brandishing Jehus beyond the line. "Hack for the Hotel Royal!"

Magnus, who with Achille was secretly observer of all, frowned and bit his lip.

To secure the wallet in a tail-pocket! Randall was plainly overdoing the trick.

However, Monsieur Antoine, for all that, had suddenly fallen directly in the wake of the trio, with an especially "lean and hungry look."

The keen Touch Detective had not miscalculated in judging him to be on the verge of temporary bankruptcy, and what incentive exists like the one to relieve one's immediate necessities?

Then success! The bait was taken and the cunning fish hooked.

Miss Grantby suddenly gave a sensational little scream of—"Look out, Randall, here is a thief!" and the next instant Randall had his fallen majesty by the collar, and was calling loudly upon the police.

Magnus smiled and rubbed his hands.

A gendarme already had Monsieur Antoine in custody, red-handed, the fat wallet still in his felonious grasp, and he was forthwith hustled away to prison, disconsolately protesting his absent-mindedness amid the jeers of the crowd.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AT BRUSSELS.

TWENTY minutes later the entire party, more or less jubilant over the success of their little scheme, were reunited at their hotel, where a delightful private supper was being indulged in, with Achille in waiting in lieu of a public waiter, that they might enjoy the more perfect freedom among themselves.

"It is rather a clean job," said Randall, who was just returned from the police station, whether he had gone to prefer the criminal charge. "The superintendent could scarcely believe his good fortune at first in having actually made such a prize as that of the King of the Paris Pickpockets himself. The entire police force there was in a state of enthusiasm bordering on delirium."

"A big capture for Brussels!" commented Magnus, who had also been to the station. "And the best of it is that Antoine will be kept in solitary confinement, and be permitted to receive no visitors until you get ready to appear against him in court. The superintendent assured me to that effect. However, he must have thought oddly of me when I paid for a good supper for the rascal, and had it sent into his cell from the nearest restaurant on the spot."

"I am really glad you did that, Carolus," cried Ada. "It was only fair under the circumstances, and I doubt not that the poor man was really hungry."

"Well, he's safely bottled up for the time being," assented the detective, with much complacency. "That is the principal thing to be considered. Achille, fill up our glasses. This dry champagne strikes me as being particularly excellent."

Achille, who, in addition to his disguise, was looking somewhat out of sorts, obeyed with his accustomed alacrity, and then, clapping to his eyes the napkin which he should have kept hanging over his left arm, he created quite a sensation by bursting into tears.

"Bless us!" cried both the kind-hearted young ladies in a breath; "what is the matter with you, Achille, poor man?"

Randall was scarcely less astonished than they, though the detective, understanding the affair better, merely smiled a little seriously to himself, as you might say.

"Ah!" sobbed Mourier, with genuine distress; "you will pardon me, I hope, ladies and gentlemen, but I—I really couldn't help it. Monsieur Antoine hungry! Ah, I should say so; and to think that I should have assisted at this crowning disgrace for the poor, unhappy gentleman! Ingrate wretch, treacherous villain that I am!"

"It is too bad!" said Miss Maycourt, sympathizingly.

"But you should take heart, Achille," observed Miss Grantby. "The man can't be hungry just now, you know. Didn't you hear Mr. Magnus say that he had sent in a good supper to him?"

"Ab, that is nothing, ma'm'zelle," replied the valet, somewhat more composedly by this time, though still disconsolately. "The hunger was nothing; and as for the supper—pouf! what is that to the disgrace?"

"Brace up, old fellow!" put in Randall; "you weren't responsible for the rascal's being trapped, and shouldn't be so hurt in your conscience over the affair."

"Ah, but it isn't that either, monsieur," the valet continued to complain. "Conscience? Pouf—a breath, a sentiment, a gossamer, nothing more!"

"What in the deuce ails you, then?" cried Randall, laughing.

"It's the disgrace of it for him, monsieur!" wailed Achille, indignantly, but with a parting sob. "Monsieur Antoine, the great, the incomparable, to forget himself with a vulgar job a second time, and in a tail-pocket at that! Oh, Lord! it is too shameful too degrading!" And he fairly stamped his foot in his vexation.

Then they all laughed out unrestrainedly, and there was no further sympathy wasted over the fresh misfortune of the King of the Pickpockets.

Bright and early on the following morning, the detective, still in his courier disguise, as a matter of course, made his appearance at No. 97 Rue d'Artois.

It was a close, ill-smelling, but doubtless in its day a more than respectable street, in a rather disreputable quarter of the city, made up of a tangled network of lanes, alleys, *cul-de-sacs* (blind alleys) and sinister courts, a little back of the theaters, and in the malodorous vicinity of the Mechlin Canal—just the sort of a locality, in fact, that would be most likely chosen by a rich fugitive from justice, desirous of keeping himself shady amid the thronged dwellings of humanity.

For this very reason, however, Magnus did not regard the locality very hopefully.

It was rather too convenient for concealment, in fact, and on that account might be given a wide berth by a man of Bartlow's veteran experience.

He, however, announced himself, of course fictitiously, at the entrance, and made certain guarded inquiries of the old *concierge*, or house-porter, who responded to his summons.

The man seemed to be rather honest, though sufficiently guarded on his own part, doubtless from long association with doubtful and more or less "scaly" humanity.

"The gentleman you describe was here but for a day and a night, monsieur," said the porter, in reply to the first inquiry, "but he then went away without notification, and has not since appeared. He was not, however, known by the name you mention."

"How did he call himself?" asked Magnus; who had inquired for a Monsieur Brunier on a hazard.

"The gentleman was a Monsieur Bartholomew while here," was the reply, with some reluctance, which, however, was speedily eliminated by a judicious tip. "We saw almost nothing of him, but the gentleman was as you describe—large, gracious, florid and noble-looking."

"I am greatly disappointed," said the detective. "And so would the gentleman himself be, if he should return and find that he had missed a messenger from a certain Monsieur Antoine, of Paris, one of his most particular friends."

"Monsieur's disappointment is to be regretted," returned the *concierge*, politely. "I wish I could help him, but am unable to do so."

"Why did I not obtain the fellow's present alias from that messenger?" said Magnus to himself. "Ah, I did everything in a hurry during that last hour of mine in Mazas!"

Then a thought suddenly occurred to him, and he once more addressed the porter.

"Stay!" said he. "This Monsieur Bartholomew, did he not have a servant with him? It happens that an old acquaintance of mine, an Alsatian or Swiss, I think," as the man began to shake his head, "served this gentleman I am seeking in the capacity of valet, or something of the sort."

"There was some such person who came here first to secure the lodgings for the gentleman."

"Ah, and he gave his name as Alphonse—"

"Alphonse Gruner, yes, monsieur."

"That is it! And now think, I beg of you, my friend: did not this man speak of his master as Herr Gossman?"

The name, or alias, obtained from the messenger, had occurred to him at last.

"No, monsieur, but only as Monsieur Bartholomew. But monsieur can step up-stairs, if he will, and look at the rooms thus paid for, briefly occupied and strangely deserted."

CHAPTER XLIV.

A QUESTLESS SEARCH.

THE detective hesitated an instant, suspecting a possible trap; then he politely thanked the porter and followed him up the stairs of the lodging-house.

The rooms, two in number, were on the fifth floor, and plainly furnished, but a brief examination failed to produce the least trace of their recent occupant, who had mysteriously departed, together with his personal luggage, which was scanty, the *concierge* declared, at about dusk of the previous evening.

From this information, it seemed that Bartlow must have quitted Soissons for Brussels much earlier than he had intended, according to what had been extracted from his messenger at Mazas.

However, it was sufficiently evident that nothing was to be made out of the specified house in the Rue d'Artois, and Magnus accordingly took his departure, feeling greatly baffled and dissatisfied.

He haunted the quarter for the entire remainder of the day, pushing his inquiries with the caution and the shrewdness that he best knew how to exercise, but with no better result.

Toward dusk, however, he met Achille by previous appointment in a small street intersecting the Rue Royale, and there was a certain hope-

fulness in the faithful fellow's face that was good to see.

"Any luck?" demanded the detective, whose own despondency sufficiently betrayed itself beyond the need of question.

"Only half luck," was the reply.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Eh, well, I've found out some one, monsieur."

"Not our man, eh?"

"No, but perhaps his man."

"How?"

"That messenger to Monsieur Antoine in Mazas."

"Hah! the fellow Alphonse Gruner?"

"So he gave his name to you, I believe. Yes, then; but it is a chance if we make anything out of the rascal, monsieur. But come with me, if you would have a glimpse of him."

He conducted Magnus to a crowded little *cafe*, or wine room, of the poorer class, where the man Gruner, sure enough, was found installed as one of the waiters.

"Good!" commented the detective, as, secure in their disguise, they seated themselves at one of the tables. "It is something, at all events—a green spot in a desert. I am your guest for an hour, 'Jean.' Catch the fellow's eye and order some wine."

This was done, but with little effect toward the great end in view; the wine being particularly sour and detestable, and the waiter too busy to be made much out of, without attracting an undue share of attention.

"I may have to mesmerize the chap again, should the opportunity occur," said Magnus, in a low voice, when Alphonse had hopped away to other tables in the course of his duties. "In the mean time, one or the other of us must keep him under constant espionage. There is no other chance of his leading us upon our lost clew."

"But you might come later, monsieur, when the place is less crowded," suggested Achille. "There may be an opening for the exercise of your black art by then. In the mean time I shall make out to get some sort of a dinner here, and keep the fellow thoroughly under my eye generally."

Magnus assented to this, and accordingly returned to the hotel, to report his ill-success to his friends.

There was still no encouragement awaiting him when he sought Achille at the little *cafe* several hours later.

The valet had merely learned that the man Gruner had been newly employed there as waiter on the preceding day, and he had even struck up a certain acquaintance with the fellow, apparently without exciting his suspicions, but equally without extracting anything from him of the slightest bearing upon his connection with "Herr Grossman," or as to the latter's whereabouts.

"What shall you do, monsieur?" inquired the valet.

"Make an essay of my 'black art,' as you call it. The place here seems conveniently deserted, or nearly so, and yonder is a curtained recess, or private supper-room, that may answer my purpose. While I slip into it for a few moments, do you engage the man in conversation over a last bottle of this sour Burgundy, which he may find more to his taste than we can."

This was accordingly done, but an insuperable and wholly unexpected difficulty presented itself to the fulfillment of the detective's purpose.

The exercise of the mesmeric gift, howsoever strongly and inherently possessed, is often attended by the most capricious and contradictory conditions.

On this occasion, the man Gruner, who had proved so susceptible or "impressionable" in the former instance, was now as recalcitrant and irresponsible as a man of wood.

In vain Magnus put forth the exertion of his will-power to the utmost tension, in order to draw the fellow to him and under his influence, from the little cabinet in which he had concealed himself; the intended subject simply continued to guzzle his sour wine at the no less disgusted valet's expense, and when the detective reappeared, looking pale, haggard and baffled, he simply greeted him with a stupid nod, and walked away in response to a summons from the *cafe* proprietor, who was about to close up the place for the night.

To make a long story shorter, it remains but to say just here that the unavailing quest was kept up sedulously for three more days, and without the least glimmer of encouragement or success.

At last the watch was even drawn off from the *cafe* waiter, and the detective, who was showing the nervous strain and brooding disappointment to which he had been subjecting himself, at last yielded to Ada's entreaties to dismiss the entire matter, at least temporarily, from his mind, and share in the innocent sight-seeing enjoyment of his friends.

Then, *presto!* there was a happy change, when least expected, and almost like a 'piece of magic; so passing strange and errant is the working of Chance, Accident, Fate, or by whatever name we can best designate the potent fortuitous force that is so inextricably interwoven with our purposes, our actions and our lives.

CHAPTER XLV.

DENOUEMENT.

It was in the Rue de Waterloo, one of the busiest and liveliest thoroughfares of the Belgian capital, and on as bright, laughing a summer morning as can well be conceived, when half the work-a-day world seemed to be picnicking, and the other half meditating an imitation of its example.

The young ladies of the party, under Randall's escort, and with the faithful Achille in dutiful attendance, were crossing the *trottoir*, or sidewalk, from the doors of a fashionable bazaar, where they had been making some purchases, to their hired victoria in waiting for them at the curb, when a sudden exclamation from Magnus attracted their attention to where he had taken up a rather listless post of random observation a short distance away.

The latter had, in fact, just been passed by a man—ostensibly a beggar or tramp, of powerful but bowed and generally sorry-looking figure—whom he did not remember to have ever seen before.

Suddenly, however, the detective experienced one of his rare premonitory thrills, or intimations, like a vague flash or gleam, and by an impulse or inspiration that was altogether uncontrollable, he started after the man, calling out loudly:

"Ho there, Jacques! Jacques Malines!"

The man stopped as if suddenly stabbed in the back, and then wheeled in his tracks, erect, powerful, quivering, his eyes ablaze with mingled astonishment and panic.

It was the robber-murderer, Bartlow or Armsdale, of the many *aliases*, at last!

Followed by Achille, as a jackal in the lion's wake, Magnus precipitated himself headlong upon the villain, with a fierce, triumphant shout.

But Bartlow's pause of surprise had been for a second's duration only; then he was off, darting across the wide equipage-thronged thoroughfare like a madman.

His pursuers, however, were hot upon his track, there being a brief, furious chase, to the imminent danger of life and limb for one and all.

It was a terrible struggle in and out the tangle of wheels and horses' legs, amid the yells of cabmen, hack-drivers, porters and amazed onlookers; both Ada and Grace having come to a sudden and frightened stop midway between their carriage and the shop-doors, while Randall, being equally loth to leave them and wildly interested in the chase, could only stare and wait breathlessly.

Sudden Ada gave a sharp cry, and, grasping Grace's arm, pointed through the roaring whirl of the arrested street traffic with a trembling hand.

"Look!" she faltered. "Carolus—Achille—one of them is down! Ah, the ruffian giant—they will all be killed!"

The cause of her immediate excitement was this: Bartlow had suddenly confronted his pursuers in the middle of the highway, causing them momentarily to blench before a resumption of that ferocious, diabolical aspect which had more than once stood him in good stead when desperately cornered or brought to bay, and it seemed as though half-a-dozen furiously driven or but partly restrained equipage-teams were converging in an inextricable snarl on the spot at the same instant.

But it was only for an instant: when Achille darted forward, his body half-bent, and, half-sprawling, clutched the giant by the leg.

Magnus was after him like a bolt from a gun, something glistening and jingling in his left hand, and simultaneously out from the shoulder and crash between the eyes flew his trained fist-blows, arrowy, piston-like and unerring to its selected mark.

There was a last desperate struggle, and when the ragged giant was seen to throw his arms aloft, they were bound together with gleaming shackles at the wrist—doubtless this time of such strength and design as to resist even his herculean wrench to twist them apart.

Then the horses' heads were thrust back, the crowd surged out through the plunging mass, there was a confused, billowy movement, as of something being torn from under beating hoofs and grinding wheels, and for another moment everything was hidden from the view of the two pallid girls and their escort still standing by the open carriage door.

Then, as there was a movement of the mob back to the sidewalk—suggestive of a life-saving crew forcing their way back to shore after a struggle with the stormy sea—it was Randall alone who shouldered his way through it, after insisting upon the young women entering the carriage out of harm's way.

It was a memorable and tragic sight that was revealed to him—the group of three that formed the dramatic center of that surging mob.

It consisted of the conquered giant, stunned, bleeding, his head bowed on his breast, the shackles on his wrists, and already with several burly policemen pushing their way from different quarters to take him into formal custody; and of Magnus, the detective, standing over him, pale and composed, and yet with a pitying eye and pitying hand for a poor, crushed, motionless and mangled mass already past help at

his feet—which was nothing more nor less than all that was left of hapless Achille Mourier, thief, rogue and faithful servant, quite dead, and with both skull and breast-bone smashed in by the cruel, pounding iron-shod horses' feet, from under which his lifeless remains had been dragged.

The long chase was ended at last, with the master-criminal in the law's remorseless clutch, and poor Achille in the more honorable embrace of a sterner but more pitying power.

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONCLUSION.

OUR intricate story-skein is at last wholly unraveled, and nothing remains but to bring the flying and perhaps somewhat ragged ends harmoniously together in the conclusive wind-up knot.

The criminal Bartlow, or Armsdale, of the many *aliases* and numberless misdeeds, unexpectedly brought them all to an end by a graceful act that might almost be viewed as in the nature of a reparation, in small part.

He was so considerate and obliging as not only to take his own miserable life—being found to have hanged himself in his prison cell on the third morning following his arrest—but also to leave a written memorandum, whereby the entire money which he had carried off from the vault of the Mount Kerton Bank was recovered, with the exception of about six thousand dollars.

The amount recovered was over ninety-three thousand dollars, in American cash or the equivalent, so that the Weird Detective had not been far out of the way in his first rough estimate as to the size of the lump-sum appropriated.

There was also, in the memorandum, a brief confession as to the writer's identity with the Jacques Malines of the heretofore Boisgmont mystery, as it had been called, but with no particulars of the crime vouchsafed, and not a word with regard to his wife nor of his past criminal career.

Poor Achille Mourier received an honorable burial in the Pere la Chaise cemetery of his beloved Paris, and there were honest tears of regret over his fate.

The King of the Pickpockets served a term in a Belgian prison, and then quite unaccountably disappeared; and as Madame Renaud, on being released from imprisonment at about the same time, or somewhat earlier—there being no formal charge made against her—likewise performed the vanishing act with perfect success, it was merely supposed that she might have joined her brother in some distant region.

The tourist party returned to Paris, after a fortnight's absence, to find Mr. Grantby almost thoroughly restored to his normal rugged health, so efficient had been the careful nursing by Mrs. Maycourt, doubtless assisted not a little by the good news from Brussels, respecting the capture of the fugitive cashier and the subsequent recovery of the stolen bank funds.

The travelers then made the grand tour of the continent at their leisure, and, returning finally to Paris, homeward bound, there was, shortly before the ensuing Christmas, a triple wedding at the American legation, which could not fail of making a certain agreeable sensation in the social world.

Ada Maycourt and Carolus Magnus were united in the bonds of wedlock on the same day that Randall Maycourt took unto himself the heiress-beauty, Grace Grantby, for his wedded wife, and the Mount Kerton banker, "Monsieur le financier," as poor Achille had called him, was duly and happily made fast to a second wife in the person of the forgiving and still attractive Madeleine of his early love.

"Well, there certainly should be satisfaction all round," Grace observed gayly to her young husband soon after the rather extraordinary giving and taking in marriage on that memorable occasion. "Papa should never complain of the son-in-law I have brought to him, when I am so complacently content with the step-mother that he has so considerately provided for me; and if I have lost a mere friend, I have gained a sister-in-law, in Ada, while all of us should be equally proud of having included in our hymeneal complications the great detective, without whose shrewdness, and heroism, to say nothing of his mysterious occult powers, our combined and overflowing happiness would scarcely have been a possibility."

Magnus received such a good round sum as his individual reward for the recovery of the bank funds that, at the earnest solicitation of both his bride and his mother-in-law, he decided to give up detective work for a much more profitable employment in the New York Clearing House, which was obtained for him chiefly on the reputation of his last great detective exploit, the history of which is embodied in the foregoing narrative.

At last accounts, Ada and he were most happily and comfortably domesticated in Harlem, with two beautiful little ones—a little Randall and a little Madeleine respectively—as the light of their hearthstone; while the other couples, whose union has served to round off our story so agreeably, were residing in affluence and contentment in Mount Kerton.

THE END.

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